

夢見る男子は
現実主義者

yumemiru danshi ha
genjitsuyugisya

[1]

おけまる

Okemaru

[ill.] さばみぞれ

Sabamizore

HJ文庫

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Hokkori★



「尊い……」

俺と夏川は生きる環境さえ違うんだ。
考え方や価値観が違ったって俺が夏川の事を
一方的に想うことはできるし、いたずらに関わる事で
いつか不愉快にさせてしまうなら
端から眺めてるくらいが丁度いい。

夢見る男子は
現実主義者

♥♥ yumemiru danshi ha
genjitsuyugisya

「……………涉は、来ないのかな」

わからない。
わからない。涉も、私自身も。
アイツ
どうしてこんなにモヤモヤしないと
いけないんだろう。



芦田 圭 [あしだ けい]

愛華の親友。コミユカ高めで
バレー部所属の元氣印。

四ノ宮 凛 [しのみや りん]

クールビューティーな
風紀委員長。イケメン(女子)。

佐城 楓 [さじょう かへで]

生徒会副会長を務める渉の姉。
学校でも家でも頭が上がない。

♥ 夏川 愛華 ♥

【なつかわ あいか】

クラス一の美少女。
渉とは色々あり、
彼にだけツンデレ気味。

♥ 佐城 渉 ♥

【さじょう わたる】

愛華のことが好きすぎる
本作の主人公。
しかし、ある日突然
様子が変わって……？



Chapter 1: After the Stardust

Now that I've moved up to high school, will I even see dreams in this world any longer? I'm sure that, at that time, my expectations for my high school life were far greater than anybody else's around me. Related to that, it reached a level where I had forgotten to properly look at the reality in front of me. It is something terrifying, let me tell you. I wouldn't want the people around me to give their own evaluation of me back then, and eventually it'll just vanish as part of my dark past.

What is most terrifying however—is that I actually woke up and faced reality during that time. That is something I can only say retrospectively.

*

Underneath the morning sun, the high school students were walking beside the roads of trees, filled with peaceful minds and feelings. Two students stood out however, as they caused a ruckus.

“Wait a second, Aika!”

“Don't get too close to me! Leave me alone!”

It was a pair of two, consisting of a reddish-brown haired female student, running away from a brown-haired boy, his hair seeming like it was dyed not too long ago. From an outsider's perspective, they might seem like a couple currently in a lover's quarrel, but these two aren't actually in this kind of relationship.

With the sunlight shining down on the girl's hair, it made it look more red than anything. Right now, she was rushing through the groups of students with a stern expression, but outside this situation, everybody at school saw her as a beauty. Despite looking feeble and slender, she possessed enough strength to shake off the boy's arm that tried to grab her.

At the same time, the boy did not let up. His name is Sajou Wataru.

He had a faintly more stylish look than the people around him, and was the type to easily fall for a cute girl. In fact, he had been in love with the girl—Natsukawa Aika—ever since they had been attending middle school. That's why he had confessed quickly, hoping for a chance of dating her, but...he was rejected without a shred of hope. Yet, he did not let up. Every single day, he would run towards her, approaching her over and over.

Important to note here is that Natsukawa Aika is a flawless beauty. That's why she had decided to attend a high school fitting her intelligence, and in order to keep up with her, Wataru studied as if his life had depended on it, managing it into the same school as she did. The power of life is a terrifying thing.

“Hehe...they're going at it again.”

“They should just get married already.”

To the other female students around, it was a heartwarming scenery. If Aika had been popular because of her looks and personality, she would have been a target of their jealousy and envy, but since the two had been acting like this since day one, they looked like a couple to everyone around them. As a matter of fact, the other boys had already accepted the fact that Wataru was **that** Natsukawa Aika's boyfriend, and did not attempt anything.

Today as always, Wataru was relentlessly chasing Aika.

“Hey, when will you finally become my girlfriend!?”

“As if I would, you idiot! Get a good look at reality already!”

“Ehhh!?”

“Why are you that surprised now!?”

Now then, those of you who are watching this, do you know of the saying ‘The moment a hundred years of love cooled down’? It means that your love for someone dies because you've seen an unfavorable side of them.

However, things were a bit different now. Utterly entranced by this

flawless beauty, the young boy continued to live in his dreams and fantasies, had his reason stolen from him, and forgot to look at the reality in front of him.

Now, let us observe the moment where he abruptly regains his senses.

“Come on, slow down a bi—”

An explosive sound like fireworks going off resounded. Something resembling stardust filled Wataru’s view. In reality, a soccer ball had shot past him and his eyes, slamming into a wall, and bounced off it again, as it rolled back to the soccer club which was currently practicing. At the same time, something that Wataru had forgotten over the years suddenly filled his head. Of course, he wasn’t injured by any means. Put in simplest terms, he **had returned to reality**.

“H-Hey, are you okay!?” Shocked, Aika ran towards Wataru.



After looking at him from head to toe, confirming that he wasn't hurt, she let out a sigh, and complained.

"Listen...I know how desperate you are for my attention, but there's no need for such an overreaction!"

"Y-Yeah..."

“For crying out loud...I wasted my time worrying about you! Stop chasing after me, will you!”

“.....”

After sending Wataru a sharp scowl, Aika went on ahead. At the same time, Wataru stood stock still, merely gazing at her back. Right when she had reached a distance where his voice wouldn't reach her, he finally opened his mouth.

“Y-Yeah...Sorry...” He finally managed to put together words again.

However, Aika's back was no longer in sight. Despite this, Wataru didn't move at all, standing there in a daze.

*

I returned to reality. I know that what I'm saying might sound crazy, but this is the best way to describe this situation that I'm experiencing right now. For a second, I didn't know what was going on. A flashy and reverberating sound assaulted me, like something had ruptured, and it took me a second to realize that this was a soccer ball. Normally, it'd be nothing special of a reaction, and yet it sent tremors through my head, making it feel numb to the level I couldn't even move anymore.

Eh, what is this?

I don't feel off in any way. If I had to put it into words, it was like I had been reborn. Isn't this a bit too crazy? For a second, I thought that I might have regained the memories of my previous life, but that wasn't the case. I can perfectly remember what I did until now, what I was thinking, and with what kind of reasoning I was acting. I wasn't possessed by a spirit. The influence of reading too many light novels? No, the last one I read was in middle school.

I don't know why, but the scenery in front of my eyes looked all too real. Before, it had been so...I don't know...sparkly and fluffy? What am I even saying, I can't tell.

From the interior of the school, I could hear the chime ringing.

“Ah...gotta hurry.”

It was the same day as always, same life I had lived before. It should feel exactly the same, and yet...the scenery in front of my eyes seemed a lot different from before. Even after running towards the classroom, I kept slapping my cheeks to keep my sense of reality. If not, I probably wouldn't have even reached the classroom at all.

By the time I reached the stairs next to the classroom, it was right before class...Weird, I feel like I came to school fairly early to meet Aika...

“Alright, one second too late.”

“Didn't make it in time, huh.”

I leaped into the classroom, but my homeroom teacher just stepped into it as well. Seems like I barely didn't make it in time. I think this is my first time being late ever since I started attending high school, which is pretty discouraging.

“You were busy chasing after Natsukawa-san again, weren't you..... Wait, she's already at her seat? That's new, alright. Did something happen?”

“Eh? No, really. I was just late.”

“Don't be just late either, okay.”

The teacher slapped me on the head with their notes, which created a row of laughter inside the class. Sitting in the middle of this was Aika, glaring at me. I gave her a glance, to which I myself tilted my head because something felt off.

“Get to your seat already.”

“Yes, I'm sorry.”

“Sheesh...”

My seat was right next to that famous beauty. Being teased and ridiculed on the way there, I glanced at Aika on a whim, but she just

averted her gaze, clearly in a bad mood. It felt like I'd summon a snake out of the bucket if I said anything more than this, so I stayed silent, and instead listened to the teacher talk.

*

"Hey, you actually got hurt before, right?"

"No, I really didn't...I think."

"You think...?"

After the morning gathering, Aika, rarely enough, walked towards me. She had me stand up, and forced me to give her my small change for lunch—Not really, but instead looked at me from head to toe again, confirming that I really wasn't hurt. Why is she suddenly that kind towards me...Ah!? Don't tell me, does she actually like me...No way in hell. I got rejected like an idiot, didn't I.

"Then, I'll repay you the favor and—"

"Sit down."

I wanted to confirm if Aika was hurt anywhere, but she just pushed me on the chest, down on the chair. I barely got to look at her toes... H-Huh? It feels like my eyes are flickering...Well, whatever. Will fix itself.

"I was an idiot for worrying." Aika said as she walked away.

I watched her walk off into the distance, and waited for the stardust in my field of view to disappear.

*

Shortly after, the first period ended. I get why Modern Japanese is important for Japanese classes, but why are we learning about classical literature and Chinese classics? They're words and terms we won't ever be using again, so what am I supposed to do by knowing about them? Why not focus more on Modern Japanese rather than Chinese short stories? Just me?

“Phew...”

I didn't even have time to take a breather today. I wanted to head to the toilet, when Aika appeared in front of me, one step ahead. With a shocked expression, she stared at me.

“Hey! Don't just follow me!”

“Ah, no, I was heading to the toilet.”

“Eh...Eh?” Aika froze up.

An awkward atmosphere followed, making me want to run away immediately. Aika must have realized that she had gotten the wrong idea, as she glared up at me with flushed cheeks, raising a quivering voice.

“Then say so sooner!”

“Y-Yeah...”

I know that this might be off from my usual pattern, but I really don't think you can ask a boy to say ‘I'm heading to the toilet’, right? I imagined that surreal scenery, and slipped past the frozen stiff Aika. When I reached the door to the toilet, Yamazaki and other peeps from my class pulled me inside.

“—Hey, did something happen between the two of you?”

“Between the two...You mean me and Aika?”

“Right. I thought that maybe you were having a lover's quarrel or something like that.” Yamazaki asked, grinning from ear to ear.

Those eyes of his...He's definitely thinking he found something interesting...Then again, I'd like to ask that myself.

“Isn't this the same as always?”

“Hmm...Well, now that you say it.”

Since I returned a calm response, Yamazaki seemed to agree with me.

But, the same couldn't be said about the other guy with him. He clung to me, and closely inspected my expression. Hey now, I don't lean that way...

"Before, Natsukawa-san would always be angry at you, and yet you'd still cling to her, right?"

"...Well, now that you say it."

"What's that reaction..."

He's right, though. Even when I saw Aika being bothered by my approaches, I never once thought 'Alright, time to give up'. Even if she was angry, I probably felt happy just knowing that her feelings were directed at me. That just shows how much I like Aika—Hm? Like?

"Hey, does it look like I have feelings for Aika?"

"Huh? The hell are you talking about? Aren't you head over heels for her?"

"...Right. I like her. So much that I want to do some missionary work."

"Hey now, nobody asked you to keep bragging about...—Missionary work!?"

Just as he said, I do like Natsukawa Aika. I adore how dignified she acts, and how she could be really considerate at times. That's why I tried my hardest to make an appeal and have her look at me. However, despite me liking her, I didn't want to run to where she was right now. It's different from how things had been so far. I want to be with her, but it's not that kind of passionate emotion I had felt until now. Does this mean that my feelings for Aika have disappeared? What is going on...

"Seems like you weren't fighting at all."

"Yeah, agreed."

"As the person in question, I feel the same."

“The hell are you on about?”

With this weird atmosphere going on, we split up. Recess was about to end after all, so we returned to the classroom. There, I felt Aika giving me a suspicious glance. More attention please, come on.

*

Lunch break arrived. Although the last break wasn't too far, my stomach had been rumbling ever since the 4th period. My inner man is always burning away energy after all. Now that that's decided, better go see Aika and—Aika? What am I planning on doing? She's got her lunch box prepared on the desk. Well, not like it's important what she's doing. How did I spend my usual lunch breaks so far?

‘—Alright, let's eat together, Aika!’

“—Ahh.”

That's right, I'd always invite Aika out to eat. When I subconsciously glanced over at her, our eyes met. She looked at me in shock, and I was wondering if I should invite her after all, but the words wouldn't come out. Instead, I felt oddly embarrassed, and my head felt dizzy.

“W-What...If you got something to say, then out with it.” She complained.

“Ah, no...Well...”

What is this awkward atmosphere? Wouldn't I always push my desk together with hers, and enjoy my food while enjoying her face? Wow, was I always this disgusting? So embarrassing...

“.....No, it's nothing.”

“...H-Huh?”

Something's off with me today. It feels like the view in front of me was different from usual. I'm panicking to a level I can't even bother with Aika right now...I've never experienced this before.

...A-Anyway, I need to get away from here! Even she must be able to

tell that something was off, so maybe I shouldn't be around her too much right now.

"Eh...!? H-Hey!?"

I took my lunch box with me. As for the drinks, I can just buy something from the vending machines on the way. I feel like Aika said something mid-way, but I don't have time to bother with that. Yet, I'm the one constantly clinging to her. I'm such an idiot...

The insides of my head were twisting and turning, although my field of view was clear. Because I wasn't up to snuff, I bought green tea, only to have coke in my hand. Well, either way's fine. I just walked as my legs carried me, when I spotted a bench on the side of the path inside the courtyard, beneath a roof. Since nobody else was using it, I took the freedom and sat down.

"....."

Around thirty seconds passed, and before I realized it, I had opened the lunch box on my lap. I did have an appetite, so I carried some of the rolled omelette to my mouth.

"...Delicious."

It was a marvelous piece of food that filled my mouth with sweetness. It honestly felt like my heart was being healed. Is this what they call the nostalgic taste of your mom's home cooking? The more I ate, the more fresh and clear the inside of my head felt. Before, it felt like I was watching the screen of a shattered TV screen, but now it was like always. Maybe I was just lacking some nutrients.

"...That might have been dangerous."

Maybe I should have gone to the infirmary before eating something. Then again, with my head in a daze like that, I couldn't arrive at a rational conclusion either way. Well...as long as everything's fine in the end, it's all-okay. I guess not causing a ruckus was the better choice after all.

5th period...Modern Japanese, huh. Alright, it's time for my brain cells to die completely. Honestly speaking, I'd spend most of my time reading random web novels online, not spending much attention in class. Since I'm still not up to snuff because of my lack of nutrition, I guess I should just space out...

Or so I was thinking to myself, when Aika turned towards me, as she heard the sound of the chair being pulled behind her. Her gaze wandered up from my chest to my eyes. Was she looking for a name plate or something? Why does it feel like I'm waiting in line to get into a club?

"...Were you worried about me?"

"Wha...H-Huh!? Why would I have to be worried about you!?"

"I-I see."

In the face of her explosive denial, I could only nod along. Was I always hurt this easily? I actually feel like crying right now. Guess I should lay low until her mood's improved. Aika-san, should I give you a shoulder massage—Calm down me. Calm down. Don't give in to your desires.

"Just that...?"

"Eh?"

"N-Nothing, you idiot!"

Alright, this one's better. Being verbally abused is nothing short of a reward after all...! Still, it's pretty rare for Aika to mumble like that instead of being frank with me, even with her rejection. Not like I want that though.

After that, Aika and I didn't exchange any words. Aika was instead talking with other people, which was probably a saving grace to me. I just spend my time spacing out, hoping that I'd be back to normal soon.

With that, classes ended for the day. For some reason, this day felt much longer than normal. After eating lunch during lunch break, I figured I'd gotten back on track...but I still can't shake off this feeling of discomfort.

Or, is it just my imagination? The class felt more calm than usual as well. Wasn't it much more noisy yesterday?

"Ahh, sleepy..."

"What's wrong Yamazaki? Lack of sleep?"

"Mm, yeah, I guess..."

I saw my neighbour to the right, Yamazaki, flop over on his desk, and yet when I called out to him, he showed me an odd reaction. What's with him anyway, wasn't he always brimming with energy after school ended? Oh right, he was a member of the basketball club, I remember.

When I glanced at my left, the opposite of Yamazaki, Aika was sitting still, not even preparing to head home. Should I call out to her...? Like always?

"Aika, should we head home?"

"Huh? ...W-Why would I have to head home with you!"

"R-Right...I see. Then, see you tomorrow."

"Eh.....Eh?"

She'd probably just consider me a nuisance. Can't bother people I care about. The hallways were full with students preparing to head home, and others who were heading to their clubs. Should I maybe take a detour home? There was this one manga I always bought on the way home, maybe that's still ongoing?

Before that though, I should probably take a trip to the toilet first.

"—Hm? Eh..."

Right when I entered the boy's toilet, I looked to the right, where they had installed sinks and a big mirror.

“—What was I doing?”

Observing myself in the mirror, I spotted a male student with fairly long brown bangs. That was myself, and I wasn't shocked at simply that. What terrified me more was my flashy high school debut hairstyle that didn't fit my average face at all. I'm not even that tall, nor am I necessarily talented when it comes to sports or studies.

A boring guy...might be taking it a bit too far, but was I always this normal of a boy? To a level where I could not add anything about myself other than my outer appearance? This doubt I had during this lunch break...Why did my love for Aika not change, and yet felt like the heat had disappeared? Right, it's because I lost my confidence. Or rather than that—

'Love makes Blind'. Isn't that what was going on with me? That makes sense. We're talking about Natsukawa Aika, right? She's the unattainable flower of this school. She's cute, got a great figure, which has a lot of guys in this school fawning over her. Still, nobody is stupid enough to actually try and go out with her. That's right, to me, Natsukawa Aika is a first-class and popular idol, and I'm just a boring fan that happened to fall in love with her.

What if there was an idol right in front of me, participating in a photoshoot or TV show? The answer is simple. I'd keep a safe distance from her, and support her from the shadows. That is the example of a perfect fan.

I guess that's why it felt like I returned to reality. Thinking about it rationally, this makes perfect sense. There's no way some lame guy like me would look good next to the unparalleled genius and beauty Aika. Why did I never realize...!

“Please go out with me—My ass.”

Nobody was present in this toilet except me. I could say these words to the person in the mirror without any hesitation. Maybe I looked like a clown in the eyes of the others, attempting the impossible.

Thinking about it rationally, being chased by some guy you don't even like must be pretty uncomfortable for her.

“...I'm an idiot...”

All the blood drained from my head, as I could see that even in the mirror. Because of me living in delusions, I lost so much precious time. On top of that, I bothered the person I cared for the most. Isn't this awful...?

“.....”

Sweat started to pour from my body. A cold breeze came in from the open toilet window, so I wiped my face with a towel I happened to carry on me. Oddly enough, until that endless sweat finally stopped, nobody else walked into the bathroom.

*

Why are live-action adaptations always so wicked and sinful? Because of an exam period in middle school, there was one manga series I had to refrain from reading, but to think that I'd learn of its continuation thanks to a live-action adaptation. Not to mention that it really doesn't hit home as the manga did. Guess I'll have to read the manga instead to cleanse my soul.

As I had these thoughts in mind, the doorbell rang. Rarely enough, it was only me at home right now. When I headed to the entrance, and opened the door, the person I expected the least stood there.

“Eh...Aika? Why are you here? Not to mention at this time.”

It was currently half past 5pm, as my idol Natsukawa Aika arrived. It seemed like she came straight after taking a bath, as her reddish-brown hair still seemed a bit sparkly from the water, and the white skin on her arms that grew from her beautiful one-piece were overflowing with alluring charm, it made my heart skip a beat. Then again, my heart is always racing with her around.

“S-Sorry to come over this late...”

“That's fine and all, but...Why?”

“O-One of the guys that stayed late because of his club told me where you live!”

Having such a beauty walk down the street at night like this is way too dangerous. It filled me with the urge to give her a lecture driven by overflowing love. Then again, that would bring me in danger most.

Why did she even look into where I live? I can imagine just how Aika feels about me. At the very least, I wouldn't try to approach myself. Definitely not because she particularly likes me. If anything, if I was Aika, I'd beat up a boy like me.

“I-Is there something you wanted to talk about?”

“Y-Yes...There is.”

“.....”

...I see. So the time has finally come. Which will it be? Is she going to tell me to stay away from her because having me around made her feel uncomfortable, or is she pushing me away because she found someone she likes, and doesn't want them to have the wrong idea about us? Either way, she came all the way over here to tell me, so it must be something along those lines.

“...Want to come in? Nobody's home right now.”

“N-Nobody is home!?”

“Let me add that I don't even know when they'll be back.”

Better let her know so that I don't have any bad intentions. Not like I would do anything like that to begin with. After Aika walked in with her tension up to a max, I guided her to the dining table. With a location in the corner of the living room, she should be able to relax best.

We're in a season that has yet to reach the beginning of summer. She'll catch a cold walking outside after having just taken a bath. I get that looking stylish is more important than being warm, but isn't a one-piece too little? Also, why would she style herself up that much

if she hates me...?

I put down some onion soup in front of her, and offered a blanket. Rarely enough, Aika accepted that without hesitation. I knew it, an idol's physical condition is most important. When the atmosphere grew a bit awkward, Aika resolved the sparks and opened her mouth.

"Hey...did something happen?"

"I mean...was I acting weird?"

"Weird...No, not really! That's exactly why it's weird!"

"C-Calm down, will you."

I can somewhat tell what she's trying to say. Me bothering Aika on the daily basis is how she sees me, so if I don't do that, something might seem off. And, Aika came here to ask about that? She's telling me to explain what I experienced in the toilet before? How could I, that's way too embarrassing.

"Even if I hit you, you don't flinch...Like a masochist coming at me with that in hope...A-Anyway, it's pretty disgusting, you know?"

"And you're telling me to agree with that."

"Y-Yet, today, you were listening to what I said, and not bothering me in the slightest! What are you plotting? Tell me!"

"....."

Normally, I'm an unreasonable adhesive man. Looking at myself, I can tell as much. Guess I can't blame her for doubting me, assuming I would be plotting something. But, if I were to explain everything, and end up hated even more, I'd probably die. For sure.

"Um...So, Aika."

"W-What?"

Instead of explaining everything, I should just show her. Make her realize that what I had been doing, the image I had of the both of us

was wrong and that I had realized this myself. For that—

“I like you. Please go out with me.”

I’m not scared of our relationship changing.

Chapter 2: Declaration and Self-Reform

“I like you. Please go out with me.” I confessed to Aika with as best of a serious expression as possible—or I had planned to, at least.

Then again, she’s heard these words countless times so far, so it might be something like a greeting to Aika at this point. While taking a sip from the soup in front of me, I glanced at the beauty’s reaction in front of me. Though, it almost got stuck in my throat because I was tensening up. Sorry Mom, I used two bags of yours for this.

“H-Huuuh!? What are you talking about!? There’s no way I’d agree at such a timing you know!?”

Yeah, I knew that. That makes sense. That’s why it had to be now.

“Hey...when did we start calling each other by our given names?”

“What’s with that rapid succession of questions...Our names? I think when we moved up to high school—Ah, right, don’t just call me that, will you! The others will get the wrong idea!”

Yeah, makes sense. I’m just bothering Aika in the end. Just acting like a boyfriend, the man causing a misunderstanding. If this spread on social networks, she’d be the only one suffering.

“...Right.”

This is reality. So far, I just averted my eyes from it. Ever since middle school, I’ve been seeing a dream with me thinking ‘There’s no way that’s the case, right’. To think I’d wake up from that dream because of a ball slamming into the wall. And you’re too cruel, you damn mirror. I’m rating you R18.

“I’m sorry about that, **Natsukawa**.”

“It’s a bit too late for—Eh?”

When I called her by her name, Aika—No, Natsukawa's expression froze up. I guess that makes sense, she told me to quit it so many times, so she must be surprised to suddenly have me listen to this honestly. With her finger pointed at me, she didn't move an inch. Yet, I couldn't help but grin at that—or rather, I failed to hide my grin.

Even after looking in the mirror—looking at Natsukawa now, she was as adorable as always. It makes me want to watch her from afar, treat like the idol she was. Although I needed to face reality, I don't want to deny that. That's why I cannot forgive these selfish feelings of mine.

“Not being shocked after being rejected, getting used to getting hit. Thinking about it, it's just crazy right.”

“...W-What are you talking about...”

“I mean—”

“I'm back~”

Right as I wanted to continue my words, the door to the living room swung open with a listless voice. The one who returned with such a yankee attitude was my older sister, a university examinee starting this year. She threw away the bag on her shoulder, took off her cardigan, and jumped onto the living room sofa.

“Welcome back, Big Sis. Maybe don't barge in like that next time, you'll give me a heart attack.”

“I'm seriously tired. Wataru, can you bring me something to drink—Wait.”

Her name's Kaede. Despite her name¹, she's actually crude and coarse, which is why I can't help but sigh in disbelief. Seeing her grow up might be one of the reasons why I fell in love with Natsukawa. Besides that, probably because nobody else bothered with me. But, as I was thinking that, Big Sis seemed to have caught on to Natsukawa's presence.

“W-Wataru brought a girl with him!?”

Did you not have any other way of phrasing things? And why would you scream that out loud...What if the neighbour could hear us? It'd be bad if some misunderstanding spread...



A few seconds later, my Mom, who picked up Big Sis from her cram school came storming inside as well. She saw me and Natsukawa sitting at the dining table facing each other, and threw a glance over at Big Sis. She better not get the wrong idea...

“You’re misleading, you idiot!”

“Ouch!? B-But...!”

O-Ohh...It’s been a while since I’ve seen Mom this angry. Then again, it was an usual voice Big Sis screamed in. Mom slammed her fist onto Big Sis’ head, and forced out an awkward smile.

“G-Good evening. Are you a friend of Wataru?”

“Are you really speaking in that tone towards a high school student?”

“You be quiet for a second!”

Man, Mom sure is emotional today. Both her and Big Sis calmed themselves down after a bit, and observed Natsukawa from head to toe. These two really have no respect for me. What kind of rude family is this? You’re making it seem like Natsukawa has a price tag on her!

“Also, she’s a super beauty. She your girlfriend? No way, right?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, you stupid daughter of mine! Look at her! ... Can’t you tell, she’s far out of his league!”

“Right. She feels wasted on Wataru.”

You know, I’d be happy about this since I don’t have to go explain myself, but are you two really my family? Did you actually just adopt me? Then again, things have always been like this, I’m not even angry. What a strong mentality I have. But anyway, this is pretty much what I wanted to show Natsukawa anyway.

“—Or so they say, Natsukawa. I didn’t even realize until now, despite it being so obvious.”

“Eh...?”

“Being rejected should shock me, being hit should blast me away. Being hated means I shouldn’t approach you any more. This is how human relationships work.”

I'm sure I must have always felt that some way or another. I like Natsukawa Aika. But, I can't imagine a future with the two of us going out. Why is that? It's because I can't ever see us standing on equal ground. We're not a good match. It's just me escaping from reality, to avoid being hurt and embarrassed in the end.

Human society works on inequality. Be it the face, the physical or even mental abilities, there's always a difference set in stone the moment you're born. That's why I needed to face reality—wake up from my long dream, and have reality catch up with me after I had been running away for so long.

“From now on, I'll try to be careful of this ‘obvious’ mood in the air. I'll keep it down as well, so, well, let's get along in the future as well.”

“G-Get along...? You...”

Or so I said, but I can enjoy my youth even without a beauty like Natsukawa, who could be straight out of some TV show. As long as I'm aware of my own qualifications, I should be able to spend a befitting high school life myself. For that, I'll borrow her strength this once.

“—That being the case, do you maybe have a friend who's about my league?”

“Wha...!? ~~~!”

“H-Huh...?”

Natsukawa's shoulders suddenly started shaking. No matter how you look at it, she seemed angry. I didn't have the courage to say any more than that, being the lowly citizen that I was. Though to be honest, I thought she'd just be happy about it...

“—You're the worst!!”

“Wah!?”

I could already see her slap me, so I covered my face. However, no matter how long I waited, that impact never came. Instead, I heard

the dull sound of something heavy being shaken. When I looked up, I saw Natsukawa storming out of the living room, heading towards the entrance. In a rush, I chased after her.

“H-Hey, Natsukawa!”

“Shut up, idiot!”

Even as I did, she brushed away my hand like always. Yet again, stardust was splattered across my view. Finally, she disappeared behind the corner of the street, into the night.

*

Ever since then, a week has passed. As for me, I was spending my days harmlessly and inoffensively. I’m pretty sure I kept an appropriate distance between me and Natsukawa as well. Though, our emotional distance might have grown larger even more. Thanks to that, most of the teachers forgot about me being the crazy clown who’s blindly in love with Natsukawa Aika. I mean, I still love her even now.

As for the students in my class, they would sometimes come ask me if something happened, but I’d just show an indifferent response, and cover it up. I don’t think they’ll get it even if I told them...

Within my means, I tried to create a comfortable daily life, and somewhat succeeded with that, when a sudden visitor arrived.

“Hey, you’re Sajou-kun, right?”

Super ultra development. As I arrived at my seat, a girl came talking to me with a smile on her face. She had lightly-colored brown hair, giving off a soft and fluffy air, but she wasn’t a gal by any means. She felt like the type of person who’d recommend cosmetics on the morning TV show. Basically, she’s cute.

“Do you have the wrong person?”

“Ahaha, I’m pretty sure I don’t.”

If you know for sure, then why did you even ask me...She’s definitely

talking to me with some kind of purpose...I don't have the skill to look through someone's appearances they're putting up, but with this smile that didn't even budge an inch, I couldn't help but feel like something was off.

"You did well finding me. I am the one and only, the unparalleled Sajou Wataru."

"Ehh? I don't get it~"

"Alright then. So, from which class are you?"

After we finished the preamble, I moved to the main topic, and had her reveal her cards. Asking who she was might sound a bit too aggressive, so I instead went for the class. I'm betting on the fact that she'll name herself added to that.

"Ah, you don't know me after all? I'm Aizawa Rena from the classroom next to yours! Want to know my three sizes as well?"

"Ah, no."

...That was dangerous...She was about to add information I wasn't even asking for. Is this what they call 'being confident'? They're not even that big...But, it's not half bad. Maybe I was always a non-discriminating gentleman. No matter your size, come at me.

"You're brimming with confidence, huh? So let me be honest, what does the cute Aizawa-san want from me?"

"Cute? You're making me blush...The thing is, I saw you buy 'SimCat' before!"

"Eh, really?"

Seems like she spotted me when I bought all the new releases from the series I read all the way through middle school. I don't particularly mind having someone see me, but since it was quite the amount, right before a weekend, I feel kind of embarrassed. That's right, I wasn't having fun with friends, you have a problem with that!?

“I actually like that series myself...Though, I really hate that live-adaptation they did for it!”

“I-I totally get that...!”

I can understand how she feels. I heard that a lot of people agree. With enough people, I'll dress as the protagonist of 'SimCat' and protest against the live-adaptation. Wait no, I'm basically doing a live-action adaptation then.

“I figured that other people around me must like it, so I called out to you!”

“Who's your favorite side character?”

“The cat Sakuya's been keeping for ten years, Kuu-chan!”

“Hmm, passing marks.”

This was the name of the cat which had been kept by the heroine Sakuya for almost ten year. The scene where she's being introduced by the heroine with 'We've been together ever since we were young', the protagonist going 'Huh? Eh?' was super funny. She's actually a cat-shaped AI that came from the future, which is able to talk, and thinks of itself as the child of a tiger. Despite being so small, she's actually got a profound character.

“To think that there was a kindred soul in the class next to mine...”

“I feel the same. Seems to be something pretty splitting in terms of taste~”

“Sounds like it.”

“Ah! Class is gonna start! I'll see you later~!”

“Y-Yeah, later.”

After stirring up my interests and stimulating my desire to talk about them, Aizawa left like a passing storm. She sure is energetic...For a second, I even assumed that she might be plotting something. I just can't help but imagine that this type of girl is super calculative.

“—Ah...”

I realized that the people around were staring at me with passionate gazes. Out of a bad habit, I just so happened to glance at my left, where Natsukawa sat.

“Hmpf.”

“Eh...”

She averted her gaze at a crazy speed. Means that she saw that entire thing from start to finish. For the fact that I (one-sidedly) spent time with her all this time until a few days ago, I kind of felt guilty suddenly talking with another girl right in front of her, not to mention so energetically and friendly. Then again, let alone dating, me and Natsukawa aren't even friends...That's right, Natsukawa Aika is everyone's girl! (*Do not touch her under any circumstances)

Thinking that far, I found myself getting happier. There exists no man who does not get happy and manages to keep his composure after being talked to by such a cute and friendly girl. I can guarantee that...!

Men really are idiots.

*

“Sajou-kun~”

“.....”

Lunch break arrived, and the girl I had gotten to know much more as of late came talking to me. With her interlocking her fingers behind her back, she looked like a shounen manga heroine.

“Ohh, been a moment. What's up?”

“Let's eat lunch together and talk about 'SimCat'?”

“Eh, ah, yeah...” As I was taken by surprise, Aizawa grabbed an open chair, and sat down in front of my desk.

Because of this sudden development, my brain couldn't even keep up properly. We met for the first time today, this being our second actual meeting. Would you really be this close to someone just because they share the same interests in manga like you do? Not at all. If I did that with Natsukawa, she'd just give me a 'Disgusting' in response. Subconsciously, I observed my surroundings.

"...!"

All the attention was directed at me. Some of the bastards were even pointing the sharp ends of their automatic pencils at me. Hey now, don't be doing that. I don't enjoy this at all...!

"A-Aizawa...If we're going to eat lunch together, maybe we should move? We're standing out quite a bit here."

"Eh...Wah! You're right!"

When I called out to her in a quiet voice, she perfectly read the mood, and responded equally quiet. She might have caught on to the attention we gathered, as she quickly packed up her lunch box... Despite that, she doesn't even seem embarrassed or flustered...Does it just depend on the person? Then again, that isn't enough for me to doubt her.

We stepped out onto the hallway, and thought about the place we could use instead.

"The cafeteria...probably doesn't even have any open spots anymore."

"Then, I know a good place!"

Since she said so, I decided to follow her. That means she must have some place she often eats lunch at, presumably with her friends. I'd rather not have it be a place where we stand out, but a cute girl like her is inviting me, so I'm happy...

I'll reflect on that later.

*

“See, a great place, right?”

“Y-Yeah...that it is.”

Aren't there like...any people like around, please? I spotted a summer house, located past the trees behind the school. I didn't even know that the school had this kind of place. It looks like a comfortable place with the sun even reaching back here, but should you really come here as a boy and girl? How indecent.

“I-It is a great place. The sunlight filtering through the trees is...”

“Right right! I always eat here!”

Nobody knows about this place, oi. This is reaching levels of ‘Nobody knows what we're doing here’. Why is she taking a boy she barely met here out of all places? No, calm down. This is a trap. A friend of hers is lurking around, taking pictures of this, right? You won't deceive me with this!

“.....”

“Hm? What's wrong~?”

“Ah, no, it's nothing.”

I observed our surroundings, but couldn't spot any onlookers. If she really planned something, she would have looked into me more thoroughly, and found out that I'm the type to stand out in class. Making me her enemy would be too risky. So, why would she go this far...Ah, that reminds me.

“You always eat here? Not alone, right?”

“Ehh, are you jealous?”

“The hell are you talking about.”

It's only been a few hours since we met. Who'd have that emotion towards that other person? Then again, boys are really quick to put on the boyfriend's face when it comes to that...But, Aizawa should know about that, and as long as I'm aware of that, I won't fall into

some trap.

“We’re gonna talk about manga, right?”

“Ehhh? That sure was abrupt~”

“If you can’t talk about it whenever wherever, you’re not a true fan...!”

“W-What did you say...! Then, let’s go ahead! Who’s your favorite character!?”

“The master’s daughter!”

“Ehhh!? She’s just acting cute and helpless! I guess that’s what boys like after all?”

Aizawa Rena—She might look like a pleasant and energetic, a bit of an idiotic girl, but it feels like she knows how to make herself act cute in front of a boy. If I had to guess, she must have dated quite the amount of boys. Of course, I don’t expect her to act like this towards me because she’s interested in me in some way or another. After all, this isn’t some romcom where this kind of development happens, but rather: Cold and heartless reality.

On top of that, we’re deep behind the school, with a small house. This really isn’t the place for several girls to eat at, and enjoy it. If anything, the time she’s spent here was probably together with another boy like me. If it was a girl friend, Aizawa would cut her off after all. If Aizawa really took me here for a special goal, then I should probably look into her male relationships first. For now, I’ll see what lies in the shadow of this girl who’s acting cute and helpless.

“—Hey, let’s eat here tomorrow as well!”

“Basically, because she’s like that—Wait, tomorrow as well!?”

“Yup! Tomorrow too!”

I’m going to eat lunch together with a cute girl like her again? I don’t even care if she’s just acting...Maybe I should raise my friendship

level with her either way...? Really, I can't help but forgive her even if she's deceiving me.

*

That day was a day spent with Aizawa. She would come to my classroom and call out to me with a loud voice. Thanks to that, people would accuse me of 'cheating', and the girls were giving me deadly stares. I don't mind not being the center of attention, but getting a minus-level reputation is a bit too much, don't you think...

Without a doubt, Aizawa has started to negatively influence my calm student life. I need to quickly cut her off...! Urgh, although it's such a shame because she's this cute!

"...Hmm."

"What's wrong? Something on your mind?"

The next day as I was thinking about exactly that, Aizawa took me to the same place again. Is this some kind of reward perhaps? Maybe the gods are watching me, and decided that I was a good boy—F-For not chasing after Natsukawa anymore?

Anyway, telling Aizawa 'I'm thinking about you' was an absolute no-go, so I needed to come up with an excuse.

"Aizawa...Are you really that big?"

"Big...? What are you—Ah, hey! Where are you looking!?"

"The shape."

"Don't look!"

Crap, I could only reflexively think of some sexual harassment in the heat of the moment. N-No, it's fine! If Aizawa's going with that, I'm down. If she's approached me with some goal in mind, I'll go all in! Even with sexual harassment like this, for Aizawa's goal, she needs to put up with it, so it can't be helped...!

Continuing this back and forth of sexual harassment in a place with

nobody else around is the sign of affection and fondness. If I could see her eyes staring at me in disbelief and disgust, I might be able to figure out what her goal was. Maybe even add a bit of body touching...However!!

I couldn't filter out her goal in the end.

*

My days spent with Aizawa continued like this. I felt like I was having a fairly good time myself, so I decided to be on watch for now. A woman you don't mind deceiving you is a scary thing, let me tell you. Still, maybe Aizawa was rushing things too much...I feel like the frequency in which she's stopping by has gone down...Did she already achieve her goal? I'll pay you so please come visit me...

“—H-Hey...Do you have a moment?”

“Hm...?”

A few days had passed since I was slapped in the face with reality, and on days where Aizawa didn't visit me, I would eat lunch at the cafeteria or the courtyard. Being next to Natsukawa would be awkward after all...

On that specific day, I just came back from eating lunch on the same bench in the courtyard. I prepared for the 5th period, when Natsukawa rarely enough called out to me. Where did that come from? Dear Goddess, what have I done to deserve your grace?

“Y-You...are you eating with Aizawa-san every day?”

“Not exactly every day, but...about that, yeah.”

“Y-You're eating outside, right? There was a girl who saw you walk outside...”

“Ahh, yeah. That's correct.”

“...I-I see.”

When I gave an honest answer, Natsukawa showed a downcast look,

resting her hands on her lap. Maybe there's something she wants to tell me? Maybe she's pissed because I already am getting along with another girl even though I barely stopped chasing after her a week ago?

...No, wait a second. Natsukawa is a beauty—a girl. Her network of information should be about 38 times bigger than that of a mob character and small fry like me (*Bias). Maybe I should use that to my benefit, and look into Aizawa that way.

“So...Natsukawa, have you known about Aizawa beforehand?”

“Eh...Y-Yes, I did? What about it?”

“I want to know more about her.”

“.....Like hell I'd tell you, idiot! Will you stop chasing after girls already!”

“Ah, hey...”

When I told Natsukawa the reason I asked about Aizawa, she got angry at me. Did she think I was aiming for Aizawa by any chance...? Damn it, that wasn't my intention at all...will she forgive me if I buy some of her fan goods...If she sold any, I'd definitely get appreciation goods, missionary work goods, and daily necessities...What even would daily necessities be?

When I was answering my own question, I felt a shadow approach me.

“That's some nice going for you, Sajocchi.”

“What do you want, Ashida?”

“Who knows? Greeting the enemy of all women, perhaps.”

“Enemy of all women...”

Looking at Natsukawa stomp out of the classroom in anger, now her friend, Ashida, came talking to me. Because she's in the volleyball club, it makes sense for her to have quite the high stature, and I don't

know how I feel about her basically looking down on me.



“Did you stop having feelings for Aichi or something, Sajocchi?”

“I guess. After all, that has changed into love now.”

“I was asking you in a more serious tone but...Aizawa-san of all people, huh...”

“I’m always serious—Hm? Of all people?”

My attention dove towards these peculiar words of Ashida. She’s talking like she’s fairly familiar with Aizawa. Maybe there’s some rumour going around? It’s fine...I have confidence in giving a rumour like that an earnest ear if she’s a girl that has trouble talking to boys! (*Happy)

“Did something happen?”

“I mean, she was walking down the hallway clinging to her boyfriend ever since she started attending this school! There’s barely any people who don’t know about her! So jealous!”

“Clinging...to her boyfriend? Since attending this school...?”

“Ah, hold on. You’re jealous towards her ex-boyfriend because she’s a girl actually giving you attention~? Rumour says they’ve been dating since their first year in middle school!”

“Eh, from that long time ago...?”

A girl’s information network is terrifying! But now, I understood one thing about Aizawa Rena. She’s had a boyfriend until recently, and if they really had been dating since first year in middle school, then that must have been a fairly developed relationship. It’s hard to assume that she came to me right after breaking up as well...I feel like I’m starting to see her goal here.

1 Kaede = Maple (tree)

Chapter 3: Soft and Fluffy

Ulterior Motive

I headed up the stairs, aiming for the classroom of the second-years. I heard a lot about Aizawa Rena's boyfriend from Ashida. As compensation for that, I gave her great detail on my best 5 cute parts about Natsukawa that only I probably knew about, and she apparently enjoyed that. While walking away, she gave me a comment going 'Yeah, it was all your misunderstanding. Gross~' with a big smile on her face. What's that for? Courtesy? I'll kill you.

Anyway, Aizawa Rena's ex-boyfriend's name is Arimura Kazuki, and he's a Senpai in his second year. According to Ashida, Aizawa would often come to the second-year classroom, and have him escort her back to the first-year classrooms. Just from that, you can guess that she was quite attached to Arimura-senpai.

I pushed up my fake glasses that were part of my disguise as I walked up and down in the hallway. The disguise is just to make sure. It'd be scary if someone from the upperclassmen knew about me. So, I want to avoid getting into any unnecessary trouble.

"...There he is."

Arimura Kanzaki. I looked him up on social networks as well. Compared to the pictures, he's got shorter hair now, and gives off a sportive vibe. Just looking at him like this, he felt like a normal Senpai. If anything, he seems like the Onii-san type...isn't he the exact opposite of me? You're forcing this too much, Aizawa-san...

While fiddling with my phone, I approached him, leaning against a wall. Seems like I found a perfect timing, as he was having some love talk with his male classmates.

'Has to be Minase, right. I want to push up that black hair of hers and take a look at her forehead.'

I get it. This mysterious charm is unbearable. As it turns out, another

Senpai standing next to Arimura Kanzaki was gushing about Minase-san. No clue who that was, but I can't help but sympathize with him...A girl hiding her face with her bangs is like Schrodinger's Cat. I want to blow at her hair, and get a cute 'Kya~' back in return.

'I'm more out for Sajou-senpai.'

"Pfft...!?"

That took me by surprise. To think there was a Senpai who could be interested in that female gorilla...! Idiotic! She's a woman who'd scream about every little thing, constantly lying, and heavy enough that the bathroom scale would give in with screams of terror! If her mood is spoiled, she'd steal my hamburger steak from me! Weren't you going to lose weight!?

'I want to become her underling, and have her assault me~'

What, you're a masochistic pig? That explains a lot. A pervert's a good fit for that Big Sis of mine. But, I still won't accept that. I'm not putting up with a masochistic step-brother. That interest of yours is not something I will endorse!

But, arguing about that doesn't matter right now...! Next it's Arimura-senpai's turn. With everybody around him being this fired up, there's no way he can skip out on it. Sadly enough, he won't be choosing Aizawa Rena. Now that she's been interacting with me, he should know that having that kind of emotion won't do him any good.

My biggest guess however is that Arimura-senpai has found someone else he likes. That's why he broke up with Aizawa, and she now resents him for that. That's probably the reason why I sometimes feel this 'That's how men are' sensation from her. Now, spit it out, Arimura Kanzaki. Who have you fallen in love with?

'What about you, Arimura? How's it going after you got rejected by your girlfriend?'

".....Huh?"

Alright, stop right there. Cameras, you can come out, this is a prank

right? No seriously, he got rejected? You were the one getting stabbed in the heart by Aizawa? Rather than killing my mood, you completely broke it in two. So then...what? Aizawa Rena fell in love with Sajou Wataru—me—at first glance, and thus broke up with Arimura-senpai? Eh? That was the first possibility I came up with though? I'm like a 55—No, 42 at best. Also, what is it then? Does Arimura-senpai still have feelings for Aizawa Rena—

'I guess...it'd be that first-year Natsukawa for me.'

—Wha?

*

“.....”

I. Don't. Get. It. What's going on? Thinking about it, I'm a high school student you could find anywhere. I don't mean to shit on myself, but I'm about as average as it can get. Definitely not handsome enough to create trouble between an existing couple.

Maybe I should just go along with the circumstances and flirt around with Aizawa then? Well, there's something going on with her, so I highly doubt she actually has feelings for me. But, she's cute. I guess I don't mind being deceived by her. That's what it means to be a good boi, right? All you girls in this country, I see you.

“...You barely came back, and you're already lost in thought again? What's up with you, Sajocchi?”

“Thinking about my own specs.”

“A plebian should keep quiet and study.”

“Shut your trap, Shudra¹.”

“Alright, it's time to brawl!”

“Stop it, you two.”

Natsukawa walked towards us, embracing Ashida from behind. Seems like I interrupted their flirting. Since I normally would have always

reacted to Natsukawa in some way, Ashida must have been suspicious since I just quietly returned to my seat.

With a single complaint coming from Natsukawa, I pulled back my fangs like a dog. Ashida saw this, and made fun of me with a ‘Haha, serious Sajocchi!’. That’s right, this is me, got a problem with that?

“Ah, I got it! You’re still thinking about that Aizawa-san, right?”

“Eh? Ah, well...Something like that, yeah.”

“.....”

Wait a second, I have two experts of male and female relationships right here with me! Even if I can’t solve the equation myself, with the help of their girly network, I might be able to filter out the variable needed in a matter of seconds.

“I have something to ask you two.”

“W-What is it...”

“About Aizawa and Arimu—”

“Sajouuuu-kuuuun!!”

“Woah!?”

Right as I wanted to ask them, I felt my back growing heavier. On top of that, I heard a sweet voice tingle my ears. Not to mention this soft sensation pressing on my back...!? W-What a revelation! I’m sorry for saying that you didn’t have much, Aizawa. This is definitely C-level! I’m happy now...

“A-Aizawa-san!?”

“Ah! Were you in the middle of talking? Sorry to bother you like that...”

“It’s fine, was just Sajocchi after all.”

Excuse me, but even plebeians have the basic right to participate in a

conversation, Ashida-san! You damn shudra...You got guts disobeying the plebeians! But girls are scary so I'll forgive you!

"...Get off, Aizawa. You're soft."

"Woah, pervert."

"Go die."

...What is this, heaven? No no hold on. Why am I getting happy being insulted by Aizawa and Natsukawa? Am I turning into a bit of an M now because of that female gorilla I'm living together with? It's totally not just a 'bit', huh.

"It's not even lunch break yet. What brings you here?"

"No reason~ Just wanted to talk to you, Sajou-kun."

"R-Really now...?"

In fact, we've been meeting less and less. Even yesterday, we only met for lunch at that small cabin. Why would she go out of her way to come meet here...? Not to mention so assertively. Also, isn't this proof enough that she has some sort of affection for me? 95% at least, come on.

"Then, then! Tell me about the reason you broke up with your boyfriend!"

"....."

Ashida, you got an iron mentality or something? Thanks to you asking that, I can't even look Aizawa in the eyes. What are you going to do about this? Even Natsukawa's got her mouth open in shock, still as beautiful as before. Makes me want to gaze deep down her throat. Haha, was I ever this gross?

Because of Ashida's lasso question, Aizawa staggered backwards, not knowing how to respond.

"E-Ehh!? Where did that come from~?"

“What’s the problem~? You’ve got the hots for Sajocchi anyway, right?”

“Ehhhh...?”

I could feel the air around me growing tense. Absolutely terrified, I looked at Ashida’s face, who happened to show an unbreakable smile like Aizawa often would. Is this...a fight between women? But, why? Why am I in the middle!?

“T-That’s...because (*that guy was a gutless idiot*) I wasn’t good enough?”

Ohh, my girly sensors are reacting. That’s the kind of phrase you’d see from someone who tries to play the tragic heroine, making the other person seem like the bad guy. Very clever, I gotta say. You’re as cute as always, Aizawa. But, I’m pretty sure Ashida will catch on to that as well. Her senses are much sharper than mine.

“Huh, that’s so brave. That ex-boyfriend of yours must be the worst.”

“R-Right~”

I mean, this is about what I expected, but...isn’t this too much of a straight ball? It’s like you’re adding ruined make-up on top of the awful foundation. I guess that girls really don’t hold back when they badmouth boys.

“But, now you have Sajocchi with you, so things should be fine! Cast aside that enemy of all women, and find happiness with Sajocchi!”

“.....”

“K-Kei...!” Natsukawa grabbed Ashida’s shoulder, fearing that she might have gone too far with that.

As for Aizawa, who had to listen to all of that, she had her eyes closed, her shoulders quivering. Maybe she’s regretting the fact that she spoke all high and mighty...? I don’t really get it, but I do understand. Natsukawa is a goddess. I was never wrong, yup.

“——like that.”

“Eh?”

“Can you not talk badly about my ex-boyfriend like that?” Aizawa said, glaring directly at Ashida.

Rarely enough, she wasn’t talking in her usual listless tone, and I could tell that she was being serious. So these are her honest feelings? After stating what she wanted, Aizawa swiftly left the classroom, barely even having talked with me. She only came here to press her chest against my back? I could live with that...

“Are you fine not chasing after her, Sajocchi~?”

“Hell no, I’m terrified.”

“What a chicken...But, I think you’re right this time.”

“.....”

I like Aizawa because she’s cute. But, I don’t mean that in the romantic sense, I just see it like a reward that a cute girl such as her is actually giving me attention. I don’t plan on doing anything that could hurt me in the process just for her sake.

That being said, if I keep things like this, I’ll just get wrapped up in the trouble myself. Not like there was any need for Ashida to go haywire either. Thinking about it realistically, going through with silence isn’t the most clever idea.

But, thanks to Ashida, I learned that Aizawa at least doesn’t hate Arimura-senpai. Without that, she wouldn’t protect Senpai like that. I don’t really get it, but I should be thankful to Ashida at least. From how I can see it, I should be able to make it out of this situation.

*

Lunch break. As expected, Aizawa didn’t come to the classroom. I however didn’t bother much with that, and instead headed to that small hut in the back of the school. It seemed like my prayers had worked out, as Aizawa sat there without eating her lunch. Oh my oh my oh my, she was waiting for me! ...Sheesh, just kill me.

“Sorry about that Shudra.”

“S-Shudra?” Aizawa’s eyes opened wide in confusion, as she looked up at me.

So cute. How dare Arimura-senpai look at another girl. Well, we’re talking about **that** Natsukawa Aika, so I might be able to forgive him. Not like I know much about Aizawa to begin with.

Just as I always would, I kept a bit of distance between us, and sat down. Aizawa was lacking her usual energy, just sitting still without saying anything. Just a few hours ago, I would have never imagined Aizawa to have such a serious side to her.

“...Say, Sajou-kun. When you’re with me, you never talk about Natsukawa-san, right.”

“I was raised to not talk about other girls when I’m with one.”

“Fufu, the person who raised you must be very clever.” Aizawa showed a faint smile, playing along with my joke.

I was only having doubts towards Aizawa, but she shows glimpses of being another goddess. How can she be so admirable? Not fair.

“But, you like her, right?”

“So you knew.”

“There’s nobody who doesn’t know. You’re always together.”

“Urk...”

Don’t say that. Those words are super effective against me. This is an embarrassing past of mine that I’d rather not touch upon again. So, please don’t...Right now, I’m supporting her as a fan, so that’s all that matters. Can’t wait to buy tickets for her concert.

“I’m pretty sure that most people know about you and your ex-boyfriend, Aizawa.”

“I see.....Probably.”

I didn't, though, so I don't even know how I could act all arrogant about it. Back then, I only had eyes for Natsukawa after all. My gaze was only focussed on a single girl...What a horrible pattern to fall into.

...But anyway, let's organize the situation. Aizawa still can't forget Arimura-senpai. If anything, I'm sure she still has feelings for him. Yet, she was the one who broke up with him. And, from Arimura-senpai's own mouth, I heard that he got the hots for 'First-year Natsukawa'. Pretty sure it all started with that.

Aizawa and Arimura-senpai were a great couple before. But, one day, Arimura-senpai fell in love with Natsukawa at first glance. I honestly can't blame him for that, she's cute, beautiful, and has a great personality. Then, Aizawa caught on to that, and got into a fight with Senpai, eventually breaking up with him despite this not even being her honest feelings.

She must have hated the idea of him not even looking at her. At the same time, Arimura-senpai must have been aware of his own cowardly attitude, and accepted Aizawa's decision. That would connect back to Aizawa's recent actions. Though, this is just me assuming things.

Either way, Aizawa Rena held a grudge towards Natsukawa Aika. That's why her attention drifted towards me, who was always close to Natsukawa. She mistook the two of us as a couple, and tried to steal me away. From her point of view, I must have seemed like an average guy that was easy food. And look at that, it almost worked.

The reason she never really looked into it, and tried vague attempts like that, is the same reason that I had with Natsukawa. She had only eyes for Arimura-senpai. Any other relationship must have been nothing of importance to her.

By stealing me, she planned to bring pain and grief to Natsukawa Aika. Finally, she would cast me aside as well, and the perfect revenge tragedy had ended, with our relationship a mess.

"I'm sure that you probably don't even care about me that much, Sajou-kun...You have Natsukawa-san after all."

“.....”

Aizawa sounded like she had resigned herself. Since she has a person she loves herself, she knows that she won't be able to change my feelings. She probably tried to read my heart with her experience in love. To be honest, I was wavering at times.

Then, how should I interact with her from now on? Just staying away from her is a bit too much to ask from the average me. If I just didn't bother with it, I'd be an indecisive man who tries to make everyone happy. What are you even thinking? Me? I don't know.

What can I, male student A, do? I don't know. What have I done until now? Kept chasing after Natsukawa. Pathetic, huh. With no experience in love myself, I don't have any right to lecture anybody. I'm not that special of a person. The only way to deal with this situation is to use the cards in my hand.

“...”

That's right, I'll pull Aizawa into this bottomless pit called Natsukawa as well.

*

I glanced over at Aizawa's profile. Her eyelashes are crazy long. Eh? Was she always this cute? I never properly looked at her like that. I rubbed my fingertips into my cheeks to get myself back on track. This is where the real deal starts.

“Aizawa...Before I met Natsukawa, I was rejected harshly by someone else.”

“Eh, really?”

“Yeah, this happened in middle school.”

I am idol Natsukawa Aika's fan. My feelings for her have crossed the barriers of love, and cannot be limited by such a definition. That's why I want to convince Aizawa that Natsukawa isn't a person that deserves to receive grudges like that.

“That rejection really hurt. Saying stuff like ‘Someone like you’ or ‘Are you right in your mind?’ and all that, basically denying my entire existence. Then again, they weren’t exactly wrong.”

“T-That’s not...”

“As if that wasn’t enough, I happened to run into the boyfriend of the girl who rejected me, in the hallway at school of all places. ‘How dare you do something disgusting like that to my girlfriend’, he said.”

“.....”

“He punched me, and sent me flying. As a result, my head flew right into Natsukawa Aika’s chest.”

“Eh.”

“She let out a shriek, and slapped me.”

“Ehhh!?”

“And then I fell for her.”

“Why!?”

“Just kidding.”

It’s true that I flew right into Natsukawa Aika. She asked what was going on, and that boyfriend pointed at me while screaming how disgusting I was. As a result of that, Natsukawa blew a fuse, and lashed out on that boyfriend. At the same time, she lashed out on that girl as well. She screamed at the top of her lungs how their actions were basically stepping on my honor as a human being.

The people around approved of her anger, as they held her in high regards. Thanks to that, I was saved, and I felt the urge to learn more of Natsukawa.

—or so I told Aizawa without much thought.

“Natsukawa Aika isn’t just cute, she’s a great girl. I’m confident that I would do whatever it takes for her. Then again, she’d probably be

able to deal with all of that on her own.”

“...I see, that makes sense.”

Listening to my words, Aizawa stretched out her legs, and hugged her knees on the bench. I don't want her to think badly of Natsukawa. That's why I'm setting her up to be the 'Girl who understands those with a broken heart'. I mean, she does understand it either way. It's Natsukawa we're talking about after all...!

“That's why I've become her passionate fan.”

“Yeah...Yeah?”

This I had to get through to her no matter what. I am definitely not her boyfriend, and I won't ever be that. I'm not some entertainer who is making everyone laugh by trying to grasp an existence far out of my reach, nor am I the energetic guy in class to cheer everyone up. I'm that type of creature, a fake human.

“...Eh? A fan?”

“Natsukawa Aika is everyone's idol, and I'm confident that I am her biggest fan.”

“Wait a second. You're not going out with Natsukawa-san?”

“The only person allowed to go out with Natsukawa is a handsome guy that I approve of!”

“That's not the point here!”

Now, be bewildered, Aizawa Rena! This is your punishment for trying to hurt Natsukawa Aika! Realize that this is all just your misunderstanding! Start blushing! More! Ahh, so cute!

“Everyone already knows about that. If I had to guess, you were probably just fixated on your boyfriend that you didn't even realize.”

“Eh...? May...be...”

“Natsukawa's great. I have confidence that I'd support her even if I

had another girlfriend.”

“Ehhh!? That’s pretty complicated from that girlfriend’s point of view, though...”

“That’s how we men tick. There’s some girls with boyfriends who still support their handsome male idols, right?”

“Ugh...Now that you say it.”

Even if Arimura-senpai was that kind of man, he’d still try to keep and maintain the relationship he has with Aizawa. As a man, it’s like part of your status to have a girlfriend or not, and just look at how cute Aizawa is. He might have fallen for Natsukawa Aika, but just completely forgetting about any other girl isn’t what a man would do. That’s just how gluttonous we beings are.

Looks are the most external side of your inner appearance. Despite not even having a flashy hairstyle, Arimura-senpai seemed like a ‘reliable senior’ when I saw him. He might have dropped Natsukawa Aika’s name when he was asked about who he liked, but I doubt he’s got any plans of making her his girlfriend. If anything, he’s probably felt like a fan more than anything.

However, these feelings changed into guilt towards Aizawa, and this led to their clash.

“Oh, lunch break’s about to end.”

“You didn’t even get to eat lunch, did you. Sorry...”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll give Ashida a complaint of my own later.”

“Ah, don’t...I’m sure that she was just trying to protect Natsukawa-san, and I doubt she had any bad intentions.”

“Eh? Ashida? Protect?”

I totally thought Ashida was saying that with clear hostility. I mean, she knows that Natsukawa and I aren’t even dating, as well as the fact that Natsukawa can’t stand me. She should be aware that Natsukawa won’t be bothered at all even if I got stolen by Aizawa. I

guess I really don't understand women at all.

"Well, that's fine. If you have too many expectations of men, you'll only get hurt."

"You didn't need to add that~ And same to you, Sajou-kun."

"I'm fine."

I don't have any expectations, nor am I particularly serious. I'm more than fine keeping a steady and friendly relationship. Thanks to that, it started to feel like my lifespan expanded for a solid five years. Being aware of it and still being deceived can feel surprisingly comfortable.

I could tell that Aizawa was back to her former energy as I watched her walk off into the distance. From how I can see it, that listless and slovenly way of talking that she showed me wasn't real after all. It's scary how she'd try to deceive me with just that charm alone.

In reality, this small hut here must be the place where Aizawa and Arimura-senpai secretly met. That means I probably shouldn't approach this place any longer. Then again, I doubt I could find this place all on my own.

If I hadn't been chasing Natsukawa, then Aizawa wouldn't have approached me like that, and I could have avoided going through this entire mess. Going through a wild dance with a cute girl I barely got to know, but we barely scratched the surface.

From this incident, I realized that understanding my own place and status lets me avoid most trouble, and that's already plenty of a lesson.

"....."

If I did that from the very beginning, then I might have avoided being left alone and lonely like this...Hey now, I actually had my hopes up for a second, huh.

Chapter 4: The Goddess' Own Feelings

With my elbows on the desk, I fiddled around with my smartphone. Sadly enough, I don't have any interesting apps on there that could get me addicted, nor do I have the ability to focus on the screen for longer amounts of time. Sitting in the back of the class like this, I would often observe the inside of the classroom.

A sense of discomfort assaulted me because of this eerie silence that wasn't there before. As of late, that guy's been acting off. Normally, he'd stick to me no matter what, constantly blurting out random nonsense at every chance. A while ago, that sort of annoying attitude ceased entirely. Well, not entirely. Even so, at first I was wondering what he was on about, and felt a bit happy.

That day probably acted as a trigger. Ever since then, he's been acting weird. I remember being awfully cold towards him with some harsh words. Because I couldn't take this odd and mysterious gloomy feeling I had any longer, I happened to go all the way to his home. Though, I didn't expect him to actually invite me inside.

'I like you. Please go out with me.'

These words I heard countless times so far. With that day as the turning point, he never used these words again to convey his precious feelings. If anything, he felt more serious than ever back when he said that. But, as always, I thought it was the same of the usual nonsense, and pushed him away. Even now, I don't think that my actions at that time had been wrong.

'—I'll try to be careful of this 'obvious' mood in the air.'

What do you mean by read the mood? What kind of mood are you reading? Even though I came to ask him about something, I was the one running away in the end. I don't really know why, but back then, I was feeling incredibly angry towards him.

‘Hey, you’re Sajou-kun, right?’

Ever since then, this cute brown-haired girl appeared in front of Wataru. I think her name was Aizawa-san. Since he was just as surprised as I was, I don’t think they knew each other, and yet after that day, he’s been walking around with her a lot. Or so I heard from a girl in my class that I usually don’t talk with much.

“.....”

It’s quiet. Normally, because of that guy being around and constantly bothering me, I don’t even get to finish my lunch. Usually, lunch break feels so short, but as of late, it’s dragging on and on that I finish eating with not even half of the break done. Then, I have too much time left over, and I wouldn’t know what to do.

Even with him being around or not, that guy is constantly bothering me. I guess he’s enjoying a talk with Aizawa-san right about now.

“...Flirting around like that.”

“Ohhh? Aichi, are you jealous~?”

“Wha...Kei!? You’re wrong, I wouldn’t be jealous because of that guy!”

“It sure is quiet without Sajocchi around. You must be lonely, right?”

“I’m enjoying the time without that annoying fly around! Don’t twist my words!”

“You don’t need to get that angry, okay.” Kei slowly approached me with a wide grin on her face.

For the most part, the general public thinks that we’re a married comedic couple or something like that. Even though he’s not even close to being my boyfriend, they constantly keep teasing me about it. I do trust Kei, but this is this, and that is that...

When I explained what I was on about, Kei didn’t even hesitate to immediately go on with a ‘So anyway’. Listen to me, will you?



“This girl that’s clinging to Sajocchi right now was walking around arms crossed with her boyfriend not too long ago.”

“Eh, boyfriend?”

Now that she mentions it...I feel like there was a couple like that walking around in the hallways just until recently. And, I think the boyfriend was a Senpai one year above her. But, wait a second. Why

would someone who just recently broke up with her boyfriend suddenly cling to that guy like this?

“Don’t you think it’s weird for her to randomly look for another guy this quickly, despite having been all lovey-dovey like that?”

“Y-You’re saying that she’s plotting something?”

“Yeah, but...I doubt she’s still plotting, and rather that she probably already...” Kei gave a brief response, only to start muttering to herself.

Don’t leave me out in the dark like that...! If that girl really was planning something, then shouldn’t we warn that guy so that he doesn’t end up hurt...? O-Of course, it’s not that I’m worried about him or anything! I just don’t want to end up on the bad end of the stick!

“Ah, Sajocchi came back!”

“Eh...!?”

“I’ll be going back to my seat, Aichi~”

“Eh, wait, Kei...!?”

Kei informed me about this with a quiet voice while packing up her lunch box, and returned to her seat. At least stay with me until the very end...! Are you going to leave it all to me!?

After that guy got to his seat, he acted like nothing happened, and just started preparing for the next class. Hey...why are you not calling out to me like you always would!

“—H-Hey...Do you have a moment?”

“Hm...?”

Talking to him first myself felt odd, and it was like I had the itches all over my body. Even so, just assuming that he might be in some sort of danger, I can’t overlook it...!

“Y-You...are you eating with Aizawa-san every day?”

“Not exactly every day, but...about that, yeah.”

Eh, what...Why are you answering me in such a flat way? Didn't you have feelings for me!? Normally, you'd try to hide that and come up with an excuse, wouldn't you!?

“Y-You're eating somewhere, right? There was a girl who saw you walk together...”

I emphasized that I wasn't the one who actually cared. If I said that I was curious, then he'd definitely get on a high horse and not shut up about it.

“Ahh, yeah. That's correct.”

“...I-I see.”

What's his problem...! Admitting his relationship with that girl so easily...! What about me!? Normally, you go around calling me a goddess and whatever, but do you actually feel that way!? You're not telling me that everything you said so far was just a joke, right!?

When we talked a bit, Wataru, rarely enough, looked away from me, and put one hand on his chin, thinking about something. He can even do a gesture like that...? Of course, not trying to make fun of him or anything.

“So...Natsukawa, have you known about Aizawa beforehand?”

“Eh...Y-Yes, I did? What about it?”

Suddenly, he returned a question at me instead. Out of a whim, I answered like that, but...Is he maybe thinking that something about Aizawa-san is off? If not, he wouldn't just ask about her like that, right...? Or so I thought, but his next words threw me off-guard.

“I want to know more about her.”

“.....Like hell I'd tell you, idiot! Will you stop chasing after girls already!”

In a fit of rage, my head turned blank. Why am I this angry? It's probably because I was going out of my way, worried about him, and he's just going around flirting with a girl he barely met. If I had known this would happen, I wouldn't have bothered to ask him! I didn't even want to see his face right now. So, I stood up, and stormed out of the room.

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Wataru's been eating lunch with that Aizawa-san almost daily now. He must be spending his days in happiness, not knowing how other people feel...!

Or so I thought, but that was only the case for the first few days, and shortly after, he quickly returned to the classroom with some bread he bought at the school store, only to get lost in his thoughts. Even though he's living the life, getting attention from a cute girl, why is he making that kind of face?

...It's a mystery. I was just sitting in the classroom, always mentally prepared for him to suddenly talk to me despite not even asking for it. I feel like he's been hiding something as of late. He can just talk about whatever, really.

I found myself glancing at him. This isn't me...! Why do I have to constantly think about him! It's all because of what Kei said!

"...You barely came back, and you're already lost in thought again? What's up with you, Sajocchi?"

"Kya...!"

While clinging to me, Kei called out to Wataru. Because she took me by surprise, I let out a weird shriek...! Kei, this is really bad for my heart, so could you not...? If you want to talk to Wataru, why not talk to him directly? Wait no, that's a bad idea! What am I thinking!?

Because Kei called out to Wataru, he looked over at me. However, when he spotted me and Kei in his field of view, he just returned his head to its original position, almost as if to show that he couldn't bother with us right now.

“Thinking about my own specs.”

I think that he was responding at the same time as he cleared up some thoughts in his head. Kei must have gotten angry at that, because I heard a faint ‘Hmph’ at my ears.

“A plebian should keep quiet and study.”

“Shut your trap, Shudra.”

“Alright, it’s time to brawl!”

“Stop it, you two.”

Since Kei seemed like she was about to leap at him, I stopped them both. You sure have guts, leaving me out to instead enjoy a talk with Kei...I won’t allow you to enjoy a hug from Kei, okay! This is necessary so that you don’t turn into more of a pervert!

Kei moved away from me, and gave that guy a disgruntled stare, only for her to clap her hands together, directly pointing at his face.

“Ah, I got it! You’re still thinking about that Aizawa-san, right?”

H-Hold on a second...! What is this about? Did he ask Kei about Aizawa-san? And she told him something? Did she snitch about what we talked about before!?

“Eh? Ah, well...Something like that, yeah.”

Pushed by Kei’s initiative, that guy just nodded along without really answering anything. Following that, he looked to his left and right, only to then stare at us with a serious expression—H-Hey, don’t suddenly make that face, you surprised me...

“I have something to ask you two.”

“W-What is it...”

There, Watru glanced at me. On top of that, because of the oddly earnest look on his face, I felt myself shaken greatly. However, right when he wanted to say something, we could see a girl with brightly-

colored brown hair enter our field of view. This girl spotted that guy inside the class, approached him from behind, and—Eh? Aizawa-san, what are you doing!?

“About Aizawa and Arimu—”

“Sajouuuu-kuuuun!!”

“Woah!?”

Aizawa-san jumped at Wataru’s back, who was sitting on his chair sideways, and embraced him from behind while screaming out his name...Eh? What? What is that girl doing!? If you hug him like that...!

“A-Aizawa-san!?”

“Ah! Were you in the middle of talking? Sorry to bother you like that...”

“It’s fine, was just Sajocchi after all.”

It’s not ‘fine’ at all! Look at his face. He’s happy about having her chest pressed against the back of his head! How dare you get happy at that...!

“...Get off, Aizawa. You’re soft.”

“Woah, pervert.”

“Go die.”

Before I even realized it, I already insulted Wataru, almost as natural as I was breathing. It wasn’t exactly on purpose, but maybe I was just annoyed to see a boy close to me flirting around with someone else. Why can’t I just be honest about that...! Also, why do you look so happy despite being insulted!?

“It’s not even lunch break yet. What brings you here?”

“No reason~ Just wanted to talk to you, Sajou-kun.”

“R-Really now...?”

Aizawa-san ignored the perverted comment from before, and instead invited Wataru out to eat lunch. Because it was this straight-forward of an invitation, even he started to blush ever so slightly. What are you getting embarrassed for...pervert.

But, it looks like Wataru isn't fully believing Aizawa-san either. Rather than doubting her, it's more like he is unsure of what she's trying to achieve with this. You really are thinking about a lot, huh? Yet, you do seem a bit happy!

I couldn't stand seeing Wataru act like that. Something kept me restless. When I was about to take one step forward, Kei got the jump on me.

“Then, then! Tell me about the reason you broke up with your boyfriend!”

“.....”

W-What are you asking!? Where did that come from!? T-That's not something you could ask so lightly, right...? Even that guy is looking at Kei in shock...I'm not in the wrong here, right? Was Kei always the type to disregard other people's feelings?

“E-Ehh!? Where did that come from~?”

Look! Aizawa-san doesn't even know what to say! That must be something she definitely doesn't want to talk about. Kei, just act like that question never happened, and move on—

“What's the problem~? You've got the hots for Sajocchi anyway, right?”

“Ehhhh...?”

.....Eh? Aizawa-san likes that guy...? T-That's a lie, right? Kei also said that Aizawa-san was plotting something, so I can't believe she would actually have something for him. At the very least, I doubt she would just fall in love with someone who constantly announces his love for another girl.

“T-That’s...because I wasn’t good enough?”

“Huh, that’s so brave. That ex-boyfriend of yours must be the worst.”

“R-Right~”

K-Kei? Aren’t you pushing your head a bit too much into this? Even if Aizawa-san were to be plotting something, I think you should approach this with some delicacy. See, even Wataru is feeling awkward. I’m actually starting to feel bad for him, being squashed between these two—T-That’s what you get! You shouldn’t go around flirting with girls like that!

“But, now you have Sajocchi with you, so things should be fine! Cast aside that enemy of all women, and find happiness with Sajocchi!”

“.....”

“K-Kei...!” I subconsciously called out to Kei in an attempt to stop her.

Even if she’s a good friend of mine, this isn’t something to just proclaim openly like that. When I looked over at Aizawa-san, my bad premonition turned out to be true, as her shoulders were quivering.

“.....!”

When I reached out to cover Kei’s mouth, she suddenly grabbed my hand, pulled it to her chest, and tightly embraced it with both of hers. K-Kei...? What are you thinking...?

“——like that.”

“Eh?”

“Can you not talk badly about my ex-boyfriend like that?”

As the rest of us were frozen stiff, Aizawa-san showed an agitated glare towards Kei, and stormed out of the classroom. Because of this sudden development, the three of us exchanged glances. And then, despite being the instigator of the situation, Kei turned towards Wataru.

“Are you fine not chasing after her, Sajocchi~?”

“Hell no, I’m terrified.”

“What a chicken...But, I think you’re right this time.”

This late into the game, it sounded like Kei was actually being considerate of Aizawa-san, as she said this to Wataru. At the same time, Wataru gave a rather pathetic response, and looked towards the door Aizawa-san had run off to.

Am I the only one who doesn’t get it...? I can tell that Kei was giving this some proper thought, and didn’t just lash out on Aizawa-san. She was probably trying to see what Aizawa-san was plotting. If so, then maybe I shouldn’t be too considerate of her after all...

What about Wataru though? What are you thinking, hm? You’re not just fooling around anymore. Did you really fall in love with Aizawa-san...? Is that why you’re staying with her?

Chapter 5: Thinking about it Realistically

Three days passed after the Aizawa Incident (*Missionary Work for Natsukawa). Ever since that lunch break, Aizawa never came to meet me, and the comfortable albeit lonely days I previously had restarted to turn into the norm again.

Oddly enough, although I don't know why, since that day, whenever I woke up, I was greeted by a 500-yen lunch box. Dear mother, did you by any chance watch everything from start to finish? If I were to put a meaning on this, then it must be the signal for me to step onto the frontlines.

“—Groaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

It wasn't just me. The fearless men around me were using their inherent physiques to push forward. As for myself, Sajou Wataru, I am merely a small fox, borrowing the authority of the tigers as I kept slipping between them, seeing no other way to participate. My, what a broad back—Yeah, I'm human trash, nice to meet you.

With me practically seeing red...from the blood rushing to my eyes because of the pressure around me, I grabbed some butter rolls and milk. This school store really isn't fit for the culture and literature-type of man. If you're unlucky, you'll end up with a few broken bones. But no worries, Mom, I got a fairly good catch today.

When I returned to the classroom, I heard loud voices coming from the inside. Not to mention that one of them sounded oddly familiar despite not belonging to this class. I kinda don't want to go back right now, actually.

“—No no no, please accept this! This is my apology for causing such a mess before!”

“I keep telling you that you don't need to worry about it! I didn't even do anything!”

“Just give up and accept it, Aichi!”

“Why are you on her side anyway, Kei!?”

Taking a peek inside, I could see a female student with familiar fluffy and cozy brown hair close in on Natsukawa. From the sounds of it, they aren’t fighting at least. But, I can tell that things would turn more bothersome if I joined in.

“I’ll just leave it here for you, Aika-sama!”

“Ah, w-wait a second!”

“Bye-bye, Renachi~”

As I was hiding next to the door to the classroom, the girl, Aizawa, I had been flirting around with as of late, or maybe not (*Definitely not), came running out of it. Getting a glance at her face, she seemed pretty happy. She then ran the opposite way of me, heading up the stairs to the upperclassmen classrooms. I’m glad she’s brimming with energy as always.

I acted like I hadn’t seen any of that, and walked inside the classroom. As I headed to my seat, my seat neighbour to the left, Natsukawa, caught on to my presence. Normally, she’d give me a sharp scowl, but rarely enough, she just gave me an annoyed look. Thank you very much. More, please.

“...Aizawa-san was here a second ago.”

“She was brimming with energy, acting all respectful...did you do something, Sajocchi?”

“Not really...I just told her about the greatness that is Natsukawa Aika.”

“Hey!! What did you tell her!?”

“Ehh...So despite eating with such a cute girl, you were always talking about Aichi?” That’s Sajocchi for you.”

It is my duty to spread the word about Natsukawa Aika. I can proudly

declare that I am her No.1 fan, and I will keep this position whatever it may take. But, what am I seeing? Why does Aika-sama have 20x limited cream puffs from the school store? How could she survive through that hell that requires you to put your body on the line...

When I glanced at the cream puffs, my gaze overlapped with Natsukawa's, who let out a sigh.

"Ah, these? Renachi got them from her boyfriend, apparently."

"Glad they made up again~"

"Eh, seriously?"

"Yep yep~" Ashida added, to which Natsukawa showed a nod herself.

Since Aizawa's affection towards Arimura-senpai hadn't disappeared, I was aiming for the best-case scenario of them getting together again, but I didn't expect it to happen this quickly, let alone easily. Guess me talking about how much of a scum a high school boy can be really helped a lot, yeah.

"She talked about having found a common interest or something like that."

A common interest? Probably something after she started meeting with me. Though, I doubt they didn't know each other's hobbies when they were dating...

'I guess...it'd be that first-year Natsukawa for me.'

—Ahhh.

"What a shame, Sajocchi~ Renachi already threw you away~ Poor little guy~"

"Mm, I don't really mind. I got some great memories out of it."

"H-Huh...!? What do you mean by that!?"

"Renachi has a boyfriend, you know! You're the worst~!"

I feel like both of them got the wrong idea, but it sadly wasn't what they imagined. Aizawa might look doable with that brown hair of hers, but combining affection and cham together, she is more like a precious existence to us boys. Even getting to talk with her alone was like a reward. I can live off a butter roll for the rest of my life—No, probably not, I'm sorry.

As I was gushing about how being a boy is simple happiness, both Natsukawa and Ashida gave me a disappointed look.

"I've gathered what I wanted to gather, so what's it matter?"

Since it felt like they were denying my entire existence and the things precious to a boy like me, I gave a bothered response. For a boy that isn't popular, just talking with a cute girl is enough to keep on living, okay?

"Hmm? Then you're fine being hated by Aizawa-san?"

"I mean, I wouldn't be happy about it, but...I don't have any expectations. Not to mention, the second a girl as cute as her starts talking to me for no reason, I'd be doubtful. It was clear that Aizawa was plotting something, and I used that to enjoy a bit of talking with a cute girl. It's the high-level technique of a skilled man like me."

"...Aren't you getting oddly desperate?"

"No no no, I'm just trying to show how—"

"That's not what I meant."

"...?"

I felt the air around me growing a bit restless, so I tilted my head in confusion. Why is Natsukawa giving me such a sharp gaze all of a sudden? And what's that serious look on her face for? Not knowing what was going on, I looked over at Ashida, who equally gave me a dubious expression.

"H-Hold on a second. What's going on? What am I supposed to say here?"

“Nothing, really~ Just thought that, despite going on about how much you like Aichi, you were pretty infatuated with another girl. Kinda gross.”

“Gross...”

I don't know why, but Ashida's words sounded much more sharp than usual, like knives stabbing me into my heart. However, telling her to quit was equally hard. After all, now that I had come to terms with my own specs, and looked at reality a bit more, if you told me to honestly fawn over Natsukawa, I'd compare it to me running a marathon with no finish line.

“I'm not going to force any contact. But, just being talked to is a time of bliss for someone that isn't popular at all. As I said, gotta gather what I can.”

“I don't understand that.”

“Well duh, of course you wouldn't, **Natsukawa.**”

“.....”

When I returned an argument, Natsukawa glared at me. I mean, aren't you popular enough...Just walking down the hallway, all of these sporty bastards would ask for your contact information, I know about it! The second interview is with me, so looking forward to working with you!

When I heard everything from Aizawa, it felt like she had ideals too big for her own good, pushing them onto Arimura-senpai. That's why, including him, I explained that we men aren't any ideal living beings, with questionable thoughts all the time. On top of that, I explained how much of a goddess Natsukawa is (*which was the main goal).

Aizawa temporarily broke up with Arimura-senpai, but she couldn't erase the feelings she had inside of her. That's why, after hearing me out back then, she must have realized that even boys have despicable parts to them, and desired to get back to how things were before. At the very least, Arimura-senpai had 'something' that kept Aizawa

attached to him.

But, I'm different. Natsukawa doesn't have any special feelings for me, and even if there were any, they'd vanish right away. After all, I don't have this 'something' with me.

"W-Wait a second, Sajocchi! Did you just call Aichi 'Natsukawa'...!?"

"E-Enough of that already!"

"Ehhh!?"

"W-With this, other people won't get the wrong idea anymore! This is much better!"

"A-Aichi...!"

Since the person in question says so, even Ashida can't argue about it. I move into the direction that will make Natsukawa benefit the most, it's a Win-Win. Yet, why doesn't Natsukawa understand where I'm coming from?

The answer is simple. The environment the both of us see is entirely different. That's why our values don't align.

"What's up, Sajou! Getting hate from your beloved Natsukawa!?"

Having returned from the school cafeteria, Yamazaki spotted us, and immediately went to tease me with a grin on his face. The others around us joined in. Since they barely got any more teasing material with me and Natsukawa as of late, they must be desperate for this.

But, this might be a good opportunity. I don't mind raising Natsukawa's popularity some more, but it could seem unnatural if I just went on praising her like this...What should I do? Maybe I should go with this.

"Yamazaki...We're in the middle of our divorce meditation, so shut up for a second."

"W-Who'd be married to someone like—!"

“Gyahahaha! The heck is that about!”

“As Yamazaki is her secret lover, I request 2.5 million yen as compensation...!”

“Huh? Eh, what?”

“Yamazaki-kun, you’re the worst~!!”

“Ehhhhhhhhh!?”

I don’t need to be understood by her. In the end, the environment we both live in is far too different. With our thought process and values different to such a level, I can have one-sided feelings for Natsukawa, and if being involved with me just brings misfortune to her—

“Natsukawa-san, are you okay!?”

“Ehh...!? No, I’m...!”

Watching from the sidelines is more than enough for me.

Chapter 6: Ordinary Boy

“Alright, we’ll be switching seats.”

The sudden tragedy occurred. Right now, I was sitting in the middle of the classroom, with Natsukawa to my right. Because of this, I could enjoy her scent and perfume on a daily basis (*pervert), but if I ended up in the corner of the room far from her, I won’t be able to enjoy this luxury any longer, the teacher probably won’t call out to me during class either, and I will cease to be the class clown everyone laughs at and teases—Wait, isn’t that something I should be happy about?

“Okay~ Then, next—Ah, Sajou-kun...”

“Eh? Yes...”

We held the seat change with a lottery, and when our homeroom teacher Ootsuki-chan saw my face, her energetic attitude vanished. Eh? Why are you so dejected? Did I do something weird to her before? Oh right, I was late, slept, and even obstructed class. Makes sense that she can’t stand my guts.

“Um, Sensei.”

“W-What is it?”

“I’ll try to take it more seriously from now on, okay? Probably.”

“What do you mean probably...Just take it seriously either way.”

If my attention were at a value of 100%, then a solid 98% would always be directed at Natsukawa. At the same time, I’ll get to have some proper sleep because I’m not staying up all night, too excited to meet Natsukawa the next day.

I looked up at the blackboard. The lottery proceeds with a ladies-first principle, and the names of the girls are written on the desk location from a top-down view. After reading through all the names from the

right end, I spotted Natsukawa's name.

I see...Second row from the back, in the middle...So basically just one seat behind her current one. Is this really anything fresh, worthy changing seats for? A-Alright, to hell with it...! I'll definitely keep the same seat! Because I am Natsukawa Aika's number one fan!

"Number one, huh. Alright, first row next to the hallway."

Figures. I looked ahead—A wall. I looked to my right—A wall. No scent at all. This couldn't be any more fresh, to be honest. I was buried between walls and nobody to talk to. I have some literary girl right next to me, barely standing out, but there's this invisible pressure—a wall that she's built up between us, as if to tell me what I shouldn't talk to her.

She already focussed on her reading again, so I guess she must have been annoyed at the Natsukawa group (which involved me) being noisy all the time. I can practically feel the hate coming from her.

I mean, not like I particularly mind. Being surrounded by people I haven't ever talked to, that just shows what kind of person I really am, and I can use that for my appeal, right? I put my elbow on the desk, playing with my sparthone. From an outsider's perspective, it must make it seem like 'Ahh, this guy was seated next to nobody he knows', right.

Grinning to myself, I thought about this 'What am I even' idea, when I suddenly felt a two-hit impact at my ass. What kind of explosive power was that!?

"Yaho, Sajocchi~"

"Who might you be?"

There sat a girl behind me, who used both her feet to kick me...This damn female student A, how could you do that.

"Ahh, how cruel! We're close enough to fight for Aichi's love, remember!"

"Hm, I doubt that. There's no way Natsukawa would take the hand of

anybody!”

“What kind of confidence is that...Well, don’t get too upset from sitting that far away from her.”

“Right back at you, Ashida.”

I hate to admit it, but...Ashida undoubtedly is the friend closest to Natsukawa. If I had to guess, Natsukawa has accepted that herself, and has shared secrets with her that she wouldn’t dare speak out loud in front of a boy like me. H-How indecent!

“And? Lonely already?”

Why are you trying to tease me like that? Aren’t you angry that you’re not next to Natsukawa anymore? Not to mention that Natsukawa was always talking to me back then.....Huh? I can only see her insulting me for some reason?

However! I am definitely not lonely or anything! Even if I’m separated from my idol Natsukawa, I can still watch her from afar as the fan that I am! Ahh, she’s as beautiful as always...!

“I’m not lonely at all. I got you with me after all.”

The passion for an idol can differ from fan to fan. Focus only on your own feelings, and show your devotion yourself. Just because you get along with others doesn’t mean your passion for them has gone down. That’s why, be a gentleman and voice your honest feelings!

“Ashida, if you also like Natsukawa, then—Huh? Why are you staring at me like that?”

“Eh?! Ah...No, don’t mind me!”

“Wah, why are you screaming like that...”

Before I even realized it, I saw Ashida stare at me like a bird that got shot in the face with a peashooter. I thought that maybe she was just teasing me again, but her reaction showed that she really was taken by surprise. I guess the noisy ones really are all from the volleyball club (*Prejudice).



“S-Sajocchi...You’re...even fine with me...?”

“Hell no. Natsukawa all the way.”

The heck is she talking about? There’s no way anybody could be a replacement for Natsukawa...Ouch! Why are you hitting me now!? Not on the ba—Ouch ouch ouch that hurts!

*

Lunch break arrived. After surviving Ashida's onslaught of attacks, I bought some sweet bread from the school store, and decided to eat lunch at a different location from the usual classroom. That damn Ashida's glares are really starting to hurt my back...!

Now, where should I eat today? This school's got a courtyard, and a lot of benches in the front. Although summer is approaching, it still is fairly fresh outside, so a bench in the shadows might be best.

".....Hm?"

In the hallway right at the school entrance, I spotted a small girl with an armband, staggering left and right. She seemed to be carrying a great number of books and other documents in her arms, having me worried just watching her. I looked right, looked left, and after confirming that nobody was around, I didn't have to worry about seeming suspicious.

"...Um, excuse me."

"Yeshhh!? Whooo!?"

"...I'm really sorry."

To think that the person I talked to would take me as someone suspicious. That really hurts. I stopped in my tracks, and took a step back from the girl.

"Awawawawa, I'm sorry...! I was just surprised to have someone call out to me...!"

I feel like I called out to her from quite the distance away...not to mention from the opposite end of the hallway. I guess even that was too much for her. Why? My face? Was it my face after all?

As for her, she had curly and mob hair, with a big red ribbon on her head. My so cute, what are you, a doll?

"Um...I thought that must be heavy, so..."

“Eh!? Ah, yes!”

“...Should I help you carry it?”

It seems like me calling out to her turned into some kind of trauma. We kept a solid 5m distance between us even. I’m actually just a suspicious guy now. What kind of distance is this?

“U-Um...I’d feel bad, so...”

“.....I see.”

I wonder, why does this feel like I got rejected? Well, that reaction is to be expected, I guess. You wouldn’t like it if a random guy suddenly called out to you, especially if you’re a girl as cute as her—In other words, is it because I’m so cool that she’s just nervous to have me around!? Yeah, definitely not.

*

It was early morning, and the summer heat was slowly setting in. It even felt uncomfortable to sleep, to a level where I didn’t even sleep until my usual time, and instead woke up around the time the elderly were doing stretches. Isn’t this a bit too early? Is what I would think, but I’m not sleepy at all, so I could only prepare to leave earlier than usual.

When I was ready to step out of the house, my older sister Kaede came down from the second floor, her hair still a ruffled up mess, barely wearing her camisole correctly. She gave me that ‘What, just an average-looking guy’ look, and seemed disappointed. You’d definitely not look that way if a handsome guy was with you, right.

Anyway, with my motivation slightly below average, I left the house. If this was some light novel or manga, this is the point where the protagonist of the story would have a fateful encounter with a cute girl. At the same, the protagonist would call themselves totally average and the type you could find anywhere, but in the work itself, they’re still hella handsome. No way they’d sell some anime or manga where the protagonist has grains of rice as eyes.

That’s why they encounter girls left right and center without really

doing anything, and if they actually do some work, the chance of that is pretty much 100%. People wouldn't care about a story otherwise. A good realistic counterpart is the example that happened to me yesterday, when I was trying to act.

'Huuuh? —Disgusting' (Exaggerated)

How do I say this, hearing that from a girl who seems docile and gentle is pretty tough. I couldn't even taste any of that sweet bread I bought, and got chills despite it being fairly soothing outside...Now I can see why people pay money for that.

"Hey."

Yeah, it really felt real. Made me realize that I was just conceited about my relationship with Natsukawa. I should probably get a better look at myself again.

"Hey!"

Now that our seats changed like that, this might be the perfect chance. Even from my point of view, only super diligent bastards would be happy about that seat, and it's even more annoying because the teacher would call you out more frequently, but if I look at it the other way, I can create a better impression of myself, showing that I'm actually turning a new leaf as a student.

"Don't ignore me!"

"Guha!?"

Because I felt my air supply suddenly cut off, I let out a groan like a frog that just got stepped on. My Adam's apple...What are you going to do if you turn my voice soprano!? I'll start singing some Mononoke-type songs, you...!

Imagining my new debut as a singer, I turned around. In doing so, I saw the face of my Goddess.

"...Ah, bliss."

"Too close!"

“Gueeh!?”

A bag was pushed onto me. That’s my solar plexus, Natsukawa-san... Before even feeling pain, I was wondering if this kind of thing was suddenly popular now. If so, then that’s definitely a bad trend. Also, I still sounded like a frog as before.

“What a harsh way of showing your affection...”

“W-What are you talking about!? There’s no way that—”

“...Yeah, I forgot.”

Out of habit, I blurted out something the old, daydreaming me would say. Thanks to Natsukawa’s spicy (in the negative way) words, I was pulled back to reality.

“...I think it’s fine to hop on a trend, but make sure not to eat the karma.”

“Wha, you’re making it sound like I’m in the bad—Also, hold on already!”

“Hm? Need something?”

First thing in the morning, I get indirectly insulted, get a disgusted reaction, and get hit with a bag. Even if I’m a fan of hers, there’s limits I can take. Before I realized it, I took a certain distance between us, with a bit of a cold attitude. Ah, isn’t this pretty bad? Did I anger her perhaps...?

“...You don’t have to make such a scared face...”

“...Eh?”

Because I heard an unexpectedly cute voice in return, I subconsciously turned around. Standing there was Natsukawa, looking at me with a sulking expression. Eh, how cute is that?

“W-What’s wrong?”

She shouldn’t care about me. I don’t think I’m that important of an

existence to her that she would show this kind of attitude towards me. Just what happened, what kind of change occurred inside of her?

“That’s what I’m supposed to ask...Not too long ago, you’d always cling to me no matter what...”

“Ahh...”

Because she showed me an emotional expression that I had never seen from her, directed at only me, I was left baffled. With this unprecedented development, the words got stuck in my throat. My mouth opened and closed in shock, only for Natsukawa to blatantly walk past me with a glare.

...Weird. I stopped being infatuated with Natsukawa about two weeks ago, but this isn’t the reaction of Natsukawa, as well as the people around us, that I expected. I totally thought that she’d become even more popular, having casted aside the nuisance that I was, and forget about me.

“...I don’t get it.”

Why did she even come talk to me in the first place? Wasn’t she fed up with me? If I saw someone I couldn’t stand, I’d take a detour to avoid them. Even if it’s a waste of time, it’s better than being forced to deal with that person.

Guess I should just ask? Not like there’d be much use of hiding what I’m thinking, and it’d honestly be pretty reassuring to know that someone is aware of me and what I’m going through. As a boy, figuring out what a girl is thinking is pretty much impossible, so I might as well go ask someone.

*

“I wonder what Natsukawa thinks of me.”

“That you’re pretty disgusting, I’m sure.”

“.....”

Maybe I chose the wrong person? Someone who’d actually consider

how I was feeling when being told these words? I appreciate the honesty, but the fact that this answer came out like a bullet from a gun does hurt pretty badly, you damn Ashida.....No, calm down. I'm an adult. I should remain calm, and play along.

“...I see, so she thinks of me as disgusting.”

“Sajocchi...Now I'm starting to feel sad.”

Ehh...weren't you the one who said it? Don't look at me like I'm some poor discarded puppy...Alright, forget about that. I'm asking for advice here, so being dejected about the smallest things doesn't help me.

“Normally, you wouldn't feel anything just because you'd get treated coldly by some disgusting and annoying guy, right?”

“Huh...? Wait a second. Sajocchi, were you acting distant towards Aichi?”

“...The second we met, she'd get mad at me, and rammed her bag into my stomach, so even I'd be annoyed, you know?”

“A-Ahh...” Ashida covered her face with one hand, like she had figured out something.

She groaned to herself, and looked at me with a troubled expression. Following that, she clapped her hands together.

“So, I don't think Aichi had any bad intentions with that. No need to take it to heart, and...”

“It's fine, I'm not too bothered by it. It's Natsukawa after all.”

“Be bothered by it a bit. Why does Aichi get a special right?” Ashida gave me an annoyed look.

Now hold on, what's that look for? It was with her hand, using her bag. The goods of a Goddess, they're super popular with a fixed class (*Member of said Fixed class).

“What I don't get is what happened after. I might have answered with

a more cold voice than usual, and yet Natsukawa started sulking in such a cute way. She tryna kill me or sumthin?"

"Sajocchi, you don't need to speak like some unrefined shop boy who can't hold back their desires."

"Basically, if I'm gross enough for her to hit me, then getting that kind of reaction from me should be no big deal, right? Being treated harshly with no remorse makes me feel much more pure and clean as well."

"....."

"Don't you agree?" I asked Ashida.

However, she showed me a complicated expression, and started thinking again. Why while looking at my face? I want to know what Natsukawa is thinking, okay.

"So, why did you suddenly start calling her by her family name again?"

"Because other people would get the wrong idea, and she said that it's annoying."

"You're not really approaching Aichi much at all as of late, right?"

"I got rejected for good after all."

"That never stopped you before though?"

"I mean, going on forever with that is no option, right. I wouldn't want to get rejected on and on like this, and constantly being surrounded by a guy she doesn't even like must be nothing short of a bother for Natsukawa, don't you agree?"

"...Makes sense." Ashida listened to me, and showed an expression like she just bit on an insect.

What a livid range of expressions she has. Not to mention that this kind of face is super rare on someone as energetic as her. Makes me honestly worried. Is my face that repulsive? She turned her back

towards me, pulled and twisted on her cheeks, and turned towards me again with her usual smile. You really don't need to force yourself, okay?

"I do agree that Aichi's attitude isn't exactly right, but you're not acting any better!"

"W-Why?"

"Because you were constantly around her, the other people at school held back, which is why she barely has anybody to talk to here! She only has you and me, so you can't just suddenly free her up like that!"

"B-Because I was clingy...?"

Ashida's words stabbed into my heart like a sharp blade. However, it made sense. I have full faith in the ability of Natsukawa to be an idol. However, what if you add me to the equation? If the other people see me be all passionate and fierce with my approach towards her, they would hold back. And even now, they might be acting reserved so that they don't get pulled in...

Maybe even my Natsukawa-loving character already ruined it all...? From the viewpoint of a student who doesn't want to stand out, you really want to avoid being dragged into that.

"...Wait a second?"

"Eh? Wait? For what?"

Now that our seats are further away, as long as I don't approach her, the others won't need to hold back, right? If I add Ashida into the mix, then it'll create a comfortable atmosphere, right...I-I know...!

"Ashida."

"W-What..."

"It's time to start our great management operation...!"

"What's up with that? Are you really sure about this?"

Now then, the reason Natsukawa showed that reaction, which honestly made me want to bully her some more, is definitely because her surroundings aren't interacting with her as she'd wish, which was caused by me constantly clinging to her, thus limiting her with the amount of people she can actually talk to. Right? Right.

—That being said, that doesn't necessarily guarantee a comfortable solution. Because they don't want to be alone, because they don't want other people pointing at them being alone, with these kinds of reasons, there are a lot of people who reluctantly choose any kind of place as long as they have somewhere to belong.

So, let's think about it. There might be a chance that Natsukawa didn't want to end up alone, that she could only talk to me, even if she didn't even want to. Otherwise, I can't see any other reason why she would do that.

“Just daydreaming is a waste of time.”

That being said, I still believe in Natsukawa's idol capabilities. I proudly announced to become her manager, but I'm pretty sure that just by me being physically distanced from her likes this will make her automatically gather more people around her. Then, there's only one thing to do. Stay in the shadows, and make the others realize that I'm not around Natsukawa anymore.

“—I see, so that's what you're thinking.”

.....Huh?

I walked down the hallway near the shoe lockers at the entrance, and nobody should have been around. Yet, ahead of me, I could hear a dignified voice. For a second, I thought like I was dealing with a boy, but when I looked up, I immediately realized that this wasn't the case. Hmm, black tights, nice.

“Is it you who went around scaring my junior here at around the same time yesterday?”

“Yes that was me I'm terribly sorry.”

Remembering something along those lines, I immediately apologized without hesitation. I haven't even gotten a look at the person in front of me, and I don't know what year they're in, but they must be a senior of mine without a doubt.

'Huuuh? —Disgusting' (Exaggerated)

Yesterday—ahh, that. Though, I feel like that girl yesterday was a bit more calm and collected than the person in front of me. This one here is more like a sadist...Hell yeah.

"I was joking—Why are you apologizing? That girl was dejected because she rejected your kind offer."

"It's my fault because I was trying to go out of my way. You're only allowed to call out to a young and sweet girl in an isolated location if you're a character from a shoujo manga. I should have guessed that I would scare her with that."

"Young and sweet girl...You do know that she is your senior, right?"

"Ah, is that so."

From the color of my necktie, she must have guessed that I was a first-year, and looked at me with a disappointed look on her face. Excuse me, but with your Takarazuka¹-esque handsome looks, I really feel like I'm losing here.

...Normally, it should be fine even if this wasn't a shoujo manga. Even if her personality wasn't the most confident, helping her in that situation would have been totally normal, me being a handsome guy not necessary at all. I feel like I kept my own specs in mind, and acted accordingly, you know.

"Your actions back then were something worth praise. You definitely weren't just needlessly meddling."

".....Is that so."

I mean, someone from the public morals committee must feel that way. These words came up my throat, but I decided to not argue any more than this. These black tights on her legs were approaching me.

If I had kept my head down any more than this, I would have been regarded as a pervert, so I reluctantly raised my gaze. Seeing a person I had never talked to in front of me, I felt a mixture of happiness and disappointment inside of me.

Shinomiya Rin. She is the president of the public morals committee, and with her calm and collected attitude, together with a handsome face, she is popular with both the boys and girls. That's probably why she could figure out what I was thinking.



“Then, if you would excuse me.”

“Now hold on.”

“ ... ”

Um, I have yet to eat my lunch, you know? What was lasagna bread again? No idea, will probably never get to eat it. First time I bought it

as well. I know that it had some cheese in it at least.

“‘Just daydreaming is a waste of time’, huh. The moment I heard those words from you, I knew that you didn’t call out to her with any ulterior motives. Otherwise, you wouldn’t mutter a realistic approach to life like that.”

“.....”

It seems like Senpai thought that the person who talked to **that girl** was someone suspicious. So despite praising me for my humble action, you were still doubting me? So she was not believing disposition, but admiring what I did solely. Alright, this sure is reality.

“However, I can’t appreciate any kind of pessimism like that. The reason she acted like that is simply because she is bad at dealing with the male sex.”

“I appreciate your kind words, but I’m fairly certain that even if there had been any other girl present at that time during these circumstances in the same location, I would have most likely gotten the same reaction. That is how a chance meeting in a location with no other people around works. Excuse my rudeness, but do you often interact with male students?”

“Hmm...”

Committee President Shinomiya has paved her own ideal way, brushing away any approaching men that she encountered. Surely, she would not be able to sympathize with either me or **that girl**. If anything, these documents that girl carried probably wouldn’t even be that heavy for her. Well, I guess I’m overstepping my boundaries here.

“Then, if you would excuse me—”

“W-Wait a second!”

“No, um...”

The number one cool beauty-type girl of this school suddenly grabbed

my arm. This is quite possibly the moment of my greatest popularity in this pathetic life of mine. If another student saw us like this, they'd definitely get the wrong idea about this. Maybe I should just go with the flow and—Um, aren't you using a bit too much strength, my lady?

"I-I need some advice."

"Ehhhhh..."

Shouldn't our positions be reversed, her being the public morals committee president and all? What kind of advice could some first-year brat like me give a great-great Senpai of mine? Don't think I could be of any help with the noble problems of a person so talented as she is.

In the end, I had no choice but to give in, and was taken away from the bench I was aiming for, instead dragged to the student guidance counselling office near the staff room. Hey now...Couldn't there have been a better location than here? Also, at least two or three people saw me getting dragged away. They probably are suspicious of us now.

"Have a seat. And eat some if you feel like it."

"Alright, then don't mind if I do."

The student guidance counselling room was barely enough the size to fit a desk with four possible seats. To think I'd end up all alone here with that beauty of a committee president...I might actually enjoy this. But, with her being two straight years above me, it sort of feels like I'm dealing with a teacher rather than a fellow student. She's a bit too admirable and attractive for me to treat her like a girl my age.

Having a taste of the pasta—macaroni...? together with some cheese, tomato sauce, the lasagna bread tasted about what I expected, as I listened to Senpai's words.

"Well, you know. The girl you called out to—is called Inatomi Yuyu..."

"Oho?"

That name sounded familiar. I think she was another Senpai part of the public morals committee. Heard rumours about her being small and adorable. Guess that means she's in direct contact with Shinomiya-senpai after all. Makes sense why she would pay extra attention to a delicate and lovable girl.

"She's a real hard worker, see. Every task I give her, she sees it through until the very end, and she possesses the pride of being a public morals committee member. Of course, the same goes for the others."

"Is that so."

Marvelous, truly. With that appearance, she must have been praised extravagantly, and yet she didn't let that get to her head, working hard at everything she attempted. These kinds of cute girls who are great at doing their work often resign from work because of marriage, huh...I think.

"However, at times, they talk about their lack of confidence in their work, and grow negative as a result. I try my best to encourage them when that happens. Some say they lose their confidence while looking at me."

"I've seen Senpai act on stage before, and I can't help but see you as admirable, and someone who truly wishes to protect the morals of the students. I can understand why other people would lose their confidence just by watching you."

"W-Wait, don't just praise me like that...So embarrassing..."

What's that cute reaction for? Don't just dare make my heart skip a beat. What is that gap about that you're showing me right here, that's not fair at all...Show me more, I want to see you more up close.

I covered my face with both my hands, and took in the scent of cheese coming out of my mouth, thus returning back to reality. Can't get weak just because of Senpai's gap moe. Come out, my sage self.

"...So, what advice did you need?"

"Ahh...that's about me, actually."

“About you? Not the other members of the public morals committee?”

“That’s right.”

I totally thought she’d ask me for ways on how to support them. Yet, it seems to be a problem related to herself. I really can’t see any kind of problem that I could actually help resolve...

“As the president of the public morals committee, I want to help my members. However, whenever I try to give them some advice, or cheer them up, I always get the same ‘You can do that because you’re the committee president’, see.”

“Ahh...I get it.”

I understand what she’s trying to say. When I argued that the same thing would have happened even if I called out to a different girl, she must have heard a nuance akin to what the public morals committee members are saying about her. No matter how much she tries to cheer up her team members, there’s no meaning to it because she’s at a level that can’t be compared to them.

“‘You can’t possibly understand what I feel’, is what Inatomi-senpai is saying, and you can’t deal with that, right?”

“Hmpf...That’s right. You sure are straightforward.”

“And now you ask a first-year for advice...?”

“I can’t consult them about this. And, just as you said, I barely talk to boys in my class, so I just happened to choose you instead...”

“.....”

I’m pretty sure that Senpai’s thirst for knowledge is bigger than the average person’s. Not necessarily related to her studies, but rather everything related to the people and life around her. As the president of the public morals committee, she has the duty to understand the feelings of other people, reaching from the students in the center of class, and even those that don’t really fit into their surroundings.

“If I had to compare myself in this, I’d probably be in Inatomi-senpai’s position. Hence, I don’t think I could understand Senpai’s values in the detail I would need to, even if you explained it to me.”

“...I see.”

“However, I can tell what these girls might want you to do, Shinomiya-senpai.”

“! R-Really!?” Senpai pushed her face closer to mine.

This already is a narrow room, so if you go any more than that, you’ll awaken something inside of me. You’re so beautiful, can I kiss you? Also, doesn’t my breath reek of cheese?

...Anyway, just as I said, I can sort-of understand what Inatomi-senpai is feeling. That’s solely because of the specs that I have, and that I feel much closer towards the ‘Inatomi-senpai Side’ rather than the ‘Shinomiya-senpai Side’. Though I’m sure there’s enough differences between me and Inatomi-senpai.

This difference between the two sides is that big, it’s like we can refer to it as a culture gap. Even if you live in the same location, you don’t necessarily see the same things and acquire the same set of values.

“Put simply, I don’t expect you to cheer them up, and I’m sure that’s the same for them.”

“Wha...T-Then, what else am I supposed to do!”

“Just give them a short ‘Don’t worry about it’, and tap them on the shoulder, they’ll appreciate that much more.”

“Eh...”

Some nonchalant body touching, uehehehe. Ah, not good, I happened to prioritize my own desires. I’m supposed to be giving advice here.

“Just with your title as a Senpai, you’re basically their superior, so if you try to put yourself on their level, they won’t feel much sympathy from that. If anything, it’d probably be better for you to not give any comment and just forcefully tag them along.”

“T-That would make Yuyu and the others more confident...?”

“Come on, they’d get a tap on the shoulder with a ‘Don’t worry about it’ from the person they admire. That’s like you’d go up to heaven in pure bliss.”

“A-Am I some kind of god!?”

“For these girls, you might be someone even higher than a god, if I had to guess.”

Oh no, imagining the committee president with the smile of the holy mother, it makes me want to get doted on by her...I need to keep a serious face. Remember Natsukawa in this case, and—Huh? That had the opposite effect, huehue.

“So this is what everyone is expecting from me...huh. It’s quite embarrassing to be treated with this much respect, but now I’m starting to see what Yuyu and the others thought of me.”

“...Are you okay now?”

“Yeah...Though, I am a human myself, so I end up dejected at times. Who should I rely on at times like these?”

“Seeing that kind of side from a committee president is honestly more reassuring than anything to us. I’m sure that your members will come to support you. Though, their methods may be different than what you would attempt.”

“.....”

There’s two years between Senpai and me, but we’re still students. Although there’s the giant premise of everyone being equal, reality speaks otherwise, showing superiority and inferiority, and despite that, here at school we only have a difference in student year as the great discrepancy of standing. That’s probably why Shinomiya-senpai had the optical illusion of her being on equal grounds with Inatomi-senpai and the other members.

That however is not the case. Difference in influence and title are born the second you move up to grade school. And, even grade

school students realize that this cannot be put into words openly.

“...Why not get yourself a boyfriend and have him cheer you up instead?”

“Wha...I-I couldn't do something so impure...”

“What type do you prefer the most, Senpai?”

“L-Listen to me!”

I don't even feel the need to use the word gap here. I tried to line up pretty words to explain it to Senpai, but if I had chosen other words, she would have surely treated me differently. As someone who lives a tranquil life, I'd like to avoid that. With a sigh, I looked at the time.

“Lunch break...is going to be over soon.”

“Yeah, sorry for keeping you here so long.”

“Don't worry about it.”

We both stood up from our seats, and stepped out of the student guidance counselling room. Since a lot of students and teachers were giving us a suspicious glance, I acted out something along the lines of ‘I got scolded, tehe~’, to which Shinomiya-senpai bumped her shoulder into me. Alright, one more body touch!

“Then, see you again.”

“Ah, wait a second. I forgot to ask for your name.”

“It's Yamazaki.”

Motto No.1 of an ordinary person: People in important positions such as teachers or the public morals committee president are not allowed to remember your name. Hence, that fake name came out as natural as I was breathing. Oh right, I forgot to put my name plate in my breast pocket. And why Yamazaki's name even?

Well, whatever, he's in the basketball club, with a somewhat decent face, so he'd definitely feel happy with a beauty like Senpai looking

for him.

“And also, I still don’t think that your virtuous decision to help was any needless meddling.”

“...Is that so.”

That just means that there won’t be any more compatibility between me and Senpai. It’s a clash of opinion. If I disagreed now, it’d birth another discussion, and we’d end up on equal grounds. However, I already reached my limit during our first encounter in the hallway. Senpai doesn’t understand just how normal of an existence her juniors in front of her are. At the same time, I don’t know if my train of thought is correct either.

Possessing things she can’t back down from, and determination to stand above others, Senpai really is strong. Since I’m only normal at best, I don’t possess the fangs necessary to face someone standing in my way.

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After shopping for some food at the convenience store, the sun had started to set. The west sky was turning orange in color. That being said, the setting sun nowadays was quite far. Maybe it had filled your entire view in the past? If possible, I’d like to see this kind of scenery even in reality.

When I looked to the east, I could see darkness preparing to cover the sky. If I had to choose, rather than being attracted to the setting sun that only emphasized beauty, I found the east sky, splitting up light and darkness, much more appealing, and realistic.

“...Wataru?”

“I”

As I stood around in a daze, near my own home, a woman’s voice called out to me, using my name. For a second I thought that Natsukawa might have come visiting me again, but the voice sounded different to hers, and it’s a bit awkward between me and Natsukawa right now. Hence, there could only be one person this voice belonged

to.

“Big Sis? What about your cram school?”

“Not feeling like it.”

Eh, and that’s enough of a reason? Well, if she doesn’t want to, then there’s no use forcing her. Depending on it, if you’re not even motivated to study, then forcefully studying won’t have much effect. Yet here I am, studying despite that for years now, hahaha.

Big Sis was munching on some steamed buns, and passed me by to enter the house. Shopping for stuff at the convenience store only to eat it right after sure makes us seem like siblings. The reason she just frowned is probably because she wanted to forget the fact of her being a university examinee at least for today. And here I was, careless.

Then again, treating her with great care so that her mood doesn’t get worse only for her mood to drop anyway is what my sister Kaede is all about. I immediately went after her, entering our home, and headed to the living room. On the way, I spotted the vinyl bag she was holding.

“Did you...buy the whole variety?”

“No, those guys just...”

“Those guys...?”

“...It’s nothing.”

Before asking if she’s going to eat all of that, I figured she’d gulp them up at high speed anyway. She’s taking a ridiculously small lunch box with her to school, but for the morning and evening, she’s eating like crazy. How can she even fit all of that.

Right as we were about to walk inside the living room, Big Sis suddenly stopped, and I could barely keep myself from bumping into her.

“Big Sis?”

“Say...did you talk with that girl after what happened?”

“.....”

That girl—must refer to Natsukawa, after she came to visit a few days ago. That was the first time Big Sis actually met her. Since I was causing a ruckus about how I had a girl I liked before, she must have guessed that this was about Natsukawa.

For some reason, I found myself hesitating. There was something stopping me from telling Big Sis that Natsukawa and I were still talking as we had before. That’s why I happened to choose a more suggestive way of phrasing things.

“You heard us last time, right? That’s about it.”

“.....”

I remembered the reactions of both Big Sis and Mom when Natsukawa ran out of the house. I still can’t forget the face she showed me when I argued that I wasn’t fit to stand next to her.

Normally, Big Sis would give me an insult or two, but she just stayed quiet, and walked on ahead.

¹ Japanese all-female theater, where women play all the roles, even men

Chapter 7: Big Sis' Situation

As of late, I have trouble falling asleep. I find myself unable to immediately drift off, but wake up early next morning. The reason for that is probably my recent lack of physical exercise. I feel like I used up a lot of energy when chasing after Natsukawa after all.

As for the reason why my pillow and blanket suddenly felt uncomfortable, this was probably related to the approaching summer. Once morning came around, it was either me throwing aside my blanket in my sleep, or waking up entirely. And even so, I can't stop myself from eating my beloved hot toast in the morning.

I took out a slice of bread from the fridge, and stuffed it into the toaster. I put on a decent amount of heat, toasting the bread to a comfortable crusty degree, and watching that happen in real-time became a habit of mine. Right as I was enjoying a crispy toast with butter, I saw Big Sis walking down the stairs with one-sided bomber hair, making me wonder in what kind of posture she was sleeping in. What a fresh asymmetry that is. She looked at me, and said.

“—This might just be enough.”

“Can you not pull some weird compromise while looking at my face?”

Big Sis is always conscious about how she appears in front of boys, rude more than anything, but I don't recall her ever bringing up a lewd conversation. I've been her younger brother for a long time now, but it feels like she's fairly particular about that sort of stuff. That's why she never had a boyfriend so far. If she'd keep quiet, she must be pretty popular though.

“I'm praising you. If I got involved with a handsome guy, it'd just cause offence for the other girls around.”

“Talking like you experienced that...”

“.....”

“...?”

H-Hey now, what's that reaction for? Don't tell me even that gluttonous Big Sis of mine is experiencing youth in her own way...? No, but that face...It looks like she remembered something she would have rather forgotten. Now...did she pull off a half-assed attempt for a handsome guy, and failed miserably? Helpless as always, huh. Maybe I should act the kind younger brother and cheer her up.

“So you finally understood...how much of a handsome guy I am.”

“What? Don't think you should be acting like that, 49 points bastard.”

“At least...at least give me that one point...!”

Ignoring my well-meant attempt, she stabbed me right where it hurt. I'm already aiming to be average at best, so don't just lower my score below average, do you even have any feelings for me!? I'm trying to live realistically here, so play along and give me some 'You tried' points!

Can't be bothered about any more of this. I held back the tears, gulped down my bread, and showed a physical appeal that I ain't about that life right now. Big Sis watched me do all of that, and muttered a quiet 'What are you doing...', which was probably the most Big Sis-like moment as of late.

“You won't be popular with that, you know?”

“Huh? I've always known that, what's the problem?”

“You...”

Throwing that remark at me had me return strong, but equally lonely words out of a whim. Big Sis looked at me like she wanted to say something, but ultimately stayed quiet. Just like yesterday, I decided to leave the house early. Since this time of day most likely overlapped with Natsukawa's leave, it'd be pretty awkward after all, but there's no way I'd be that unfortunate to meet her again. So, I grabbed my bag, and headed for the entrance.

“Ah, wait a second, Wataru.”

“...Huh?”

*

“???”

‘I’m going with you’, is what Big Sis said, so I was forced to wait for her. With this event that had never occurred so far, I couldn’t help but feel restless. D-Don’t tell me, was she actually a bro-con all this time...!?

“Huuuh? —Disgusting’ (Third time)

Yeah, not happening. There’s no way that audacious and insolent Big Sis of mine would be a bro-con. I felt disgusted at myself for even coming up with that possibility, and had my imaginary Big Sis do the job of insulting me. Sensei, I’m not motivated to go to school anymore.

I don’t even get what’s going on. I don’t think it has happened ever since I moved up to middle school. I honestly didn’t like the idea of going to school with Big Sis either, to be honest.

“I’m leaving.”

“...ing.”

I figured that she wouldn’t say anything like that herself, so I took the bullet, to which she joined in with a quiet voice. Right now, she might be much more calm and collected, but back when she started attending high school, she was in her so-called gal period, acting out rude behaviour like not telling our parents when she left. Seems like there’s still some remains from that time.

“...So? Why’d you suddenly want to go together?”

“Huh? I only said I’d go with you.”

“Where’s the difference...?”

We're talking about a mysterious life form called 'woman' here. If this was any other attribute besides being my older sister, I might just call her a tsundere and be secretly happy. Why did she make me wait for her then, I don't get it. In the end, I was forced to just follow her, only for her to abruptly stop not even a few meters later.

"Huh? Why'd you stop?"

"...That girl." Big Sis used her chin to point in a direction.

...Really? With your chin? Following her gaze (?), I spotted the back of a familiar girl standing right at the corner of the street. It's not that she was necessarily waiting for anything, but rather carefully peeked around the corner. With that miniskirt, if she leaned forward a bit more, I might just see something...Thanks for the treat, Natsukawa-sama.

"....."

"....."

"Hey, you know her, right? Don't just stay quiet, and talk to her. We need to walk past her anyway."

"Phew, I get it already, just don't glare at me."

She must have realized that I was hesitating, and tapped me on the shoulder to gently push me forward. Thinking about this realistically, I can already tell that things will end up annoying if I call out to her here, so I'd rather not. Can't we just take a detour and ignore her? However, I felt the pressure at my back, so I saw no other choice.

"——Natsukawa."

"Hyawa!?"

What...was that? My heart went Hyawa. Being treated to an adorable shriek coming from Natsukawa's cute mouth, I felt like my heart was about to explode. Final explosion!

"W-Wataru...!?"

“Yo, what are you sneaking around he—re?”

Hmm...? Did she just call me by my name? Wouldn't she always call me with my family name...No, how did she call me before?

“There's some weird people...! What's up with them!?”

“Wah, such a nice smell—Eh? Weird people?”

Natsukawa suddenly grabbed my arm, pulling me closer. For a second, my honest feelings were about to come out, but I somewhat managed to hold myself back (*Not really). When I looked at where Natsukawa was pointing, I realized what she was talking about.

“What's up with that...!”

“Hmmm...?”

I spotted four high school boys wearing our school's uniform, standing in front of a wall. They looked like champions about to challenge the Four Heavenly Generals. I feel like they'd challenge me to a battle if our eyes met.

“Not to mention that they all got the faces of an elite trainer.”

“What are you talking about...”

“Hey, how much longer is this going to take?”

“Eh...Ah!? Wataru's Onee-san...!?”

Right as I spit poison at their needlessly handsome faces, Big Sis (Lv. 63) walked towards us and urged us to continue. I definitely can't win against her...No, wait a second, Natsukawa suddenly softening up the second Big Sis arrived is a sight to behold. I can't lose just yet! Wataru used jump! ...Nothing happened!

“What have you peeps been staring at—Ugh...”

“...Big Sis?”

‘Ah! If it ain't Kaede!’

“Huh?”

My danger sense was ringing every single alarm bell in my body. These elite trainers screamed the name of my Big Sis, and all started moving towards us. I wanted to run away, but Big Sis hid behind me while grabbing my arm. What kind of deadlock is this?

“Hey, Kaede! Who is that man!? Why are you hiding from us!”

“Shut up! Why’d you all wait for me like this! Gross!”

“Me*anium, I choose you!”

“H-Hey, will read you the atmosphere...!” Natsukawa started panicking for real, and grabbed onto my uniform.

There’s no greater happiness than this. I really want to shake everyone off and land a mad dash to school. Can I? I can’t? Man...

“K-Kaede is relying on some first-year brat...? I’ve never seen some guy like you before!”

Same here, this is the first time I met someone who called Big Sis by her given name. Not to mention four people at once. When did Big Sis build a reverse harem like this?

“Hey, first-year! Tell me your name!”

“Sajou Wataru.”

“Sajou Wataru! Never heard of that name befo—Eh? ‘Sajou?’”

“Yes, Sajou Wataru.”

Since the Kaede Family — or [K4] for short — all threw harsh glares at me, I gave a concise response. Judging from the color of their neckties, they seemed to be second- and third-year Senpais, and I don’t see any chance of making it through this situation alive, so I could only give in.

“S-Sajou...are you actually—”

“Please move out of the way, Todoroki-senpai.”

“Ah, hey!”

The lively handsome third-year was shoved out of the way for a talented-type second-year handsome guy to appear. Although his glasses weren't even off-center, he pushed them up nonetheless. I don't get the reason for that to be honest. Stop trying to act cool, you bastard.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Sajou Wataru-san. My name is Kai Takuto. If I may be so rude, what kind of relationship do you have with Kaede-san?”

“We live under the same roof, and share compromises with each other.”

“Why'd you phrase it that way?” Big Sis complained.

Ah, my bad. I just happened to act rebellious out on a whim. A sudden erotic topic happening that actually involved Big Sis just made me so happy! Big Sis slapped me on the head, and stepped in front of me.

“He's my younger brother...! Look! We totally resemble...Actually, we don't really look like...”

“Yup.”

“Yep.”

“.....”

“.....”

Makes sense. Our points definitely aren't in the same category. I never gave Big Sis' face an actual grade, but she's definitely much higher than me. Worst part is that this guy's actually a friend of Arimura-senpai, and the one who said he's out for Big Sis. Not to mention that's greatly winning against me. So, there's only one thing for me to do.

“Alright, Big Sis, I don’t want to be in your way any more than this, I’ll be on my way now.”

“Huh? Wait, what are you talking about—”

“Don’t worry about it. You have all these Senpais longing for your attention, so I’d rather not ruin anything.”

“No, we’re not that friendly or anything...”

“I’ll see you once school is over!”

“H-Hold on a second!”

Right when I wanted to run away like my life was on the line, Natsukawa grabbed me. Since she grabbed the flank of my uniform with her full strength, I was pulled towards her, which is why Natsukawa’s head appeared beneath my arm, like she was poking out her head. If only I put more strength into my arm, it would be a perfect choking hold, but not like I would do that though. However, I wasn’t allowed to enjoy this sensation much, as she escaped, and now fully glared at me.

“W-What are you thinking, leaving me all alone...!”

“Please I beg you don’t stop me...! If I stay here any longer, I’ll get done in by these handsome guys, and dissolve...!”

“Like hell you would...! Forget about your inferiority complex for a moment, will you...!”

Rarely enough, Natsukawa was clinging to me instead of letting go. Her eyes were dead serious as well. And yet, how could I still wish for the person I like to release such a passionate grasp on me. It’s probably because I could see Big Sis right behind Natsukawa, glaring at me with a ‘You prepare yourself for an ass whooping later’ kind of look.

“...Let’s all go together, shall we?”

“...Hmpf”. Big Sis let out a bothered snort, and closed her eyes.

I-I'm saved...! As the handsome Senpais all had question marks above their heads, Big Sis walked through the group, and I followed after. Before I realized it, the arm I was carrying my student bag with was now grabbed by Big Sis. My other arm was in Natsukawa's grasp. It felt like I was a dog taken out on a walk, woof. I can't even tell what Natsukawa is thinking anymore. Can I just make her my girlfriend now? I can't? Knew it.

"I had no idea that Kaede actually has a younger brother. Why did you never tell us?"

"Why would I have to tell you people?"

"So cold~" The feeble-type third-year Senpai gently tapped Big Sis on the shoulder while letting out a heartfelt laugh.

Looking at his towering height of at least 180cm, I yet again was forced to realize the inequalities reigning in this world. Why don't you just continue growing for all eternity then? Hit your head on the entrance door of a convenience store for all I care.

"By the way, who's that girl? Kaede Brother's girlfriend...?"

"Ah! H-Hey, idiot!" Big Sis raised a voice.

"?"

There, the cool-type handsome third-year Senpai that had stayed quiet all this time finally spoke up. Even his voice is handsome. I'd so practice some pick-up lines in the bath if I got a voice like that. He seemed the most reasonable out of the bunch going from pure impression, but...he sure dropped a bomb now. Big Sis even tried to stop him, but it didn't do anything.

"N-No, the two of us aren't—"

"We're not like that, Senpai." I spoke up.

"Ah, I see. Sorry for asking a strange question like that."

You can say that again, you bastard. The other three all nodded in consent as well. I can already guess why they'd be that easy to do

that. It sure doesn't feel great, I can't lie. From the looks of it, these four peeps are masochists, trained by Big Sis (*Bias). Maybe one of these guys could just become Natsukawa's boyfriend, that would be passable for me.

As for Big Sis, she was busy retorting and taking care of the free and uncontrolled Senpais. She already moved her arm away from me as well. I dropped my walking speed, and started to tag along behind them.

“...Sorry about this...Natsukawa.”

“...Don't worry about it.”

I don't know why, but Natsukawa stayed next to me even now. I wouldn't mind if she went on ahead, but maybe she really has this consciousness of needing to stay with me, something like a support for her...Even so, including Natsukawa in the mix, walking along with all these beautiful people was a bit too tough to handle.

*

“A-Ahh...It's time for us to split up, it seems...”

“.....”

As we arrived at the front entrance, we all had a different location to head off to. Being surrounded by these handsome men, Big Sis glared at us like she was chewing on an insect. How odd, despite only being attracted to looks, and this being a great situation for her, I can still perfectly understand what she is feeling. I'm sure that she hates any gazes of affection and curiosity the most. I'm scared of what will happen after she gets home later.

From what I heard, all these handsome guys are actually part of the student council, including Big Sis as the current vice-student council president. At first, I was worried having someone so crude and violent in the student council, but now it makes sense. On a side note, the cool-type Senpai was actually the student council president. These guys really are so friendly.

As the technical Otasa Princess¹, yet 300 times more normie, Big Sis

was pulled along by the K4, walking into the opposite direction of us. Soon enough, her grudge towards me disappeared, as all her attention turned towards the handsome guys. It's crazy how she acts like another sister even towards other people. Then again, these four peeps are like puppies practically glued to her owner, so that makes sense.

"...Oh yeah, she didn't seem too happy being surrounded by all those handsome guys, that Natsukawa."

"H-Huuh!? Who do you take me for!?"

"Woah!?"

"Why are you the one being shocked the most...!"

Even though I responded with surprise of my own, I was only met with a harsh scowl coming from Natsukawa. The reason I was shocked most is that she was still behind me. I figured she had already put on her indoor shoes, and headed to the classroom.

"D-Didn't you go on ahead...?"

"Why would you think I'd just leave you alone here..."

"Oh my..."

I mean, aren't I annoying? But, I couldn't say that out loud. I wouldn't want to be hated even more than this after all...Not to mention that I didn't want to get drunk on this happiness of her being considerate of me, and get the wrong idea. Still, she is so cute after all.

Because we took a bit longer caused by all the ruckus with Big Sis, we made it just in time for the morning homeroom. I felt a bit awkward walking through the rows of students with Natsukawa next to me, leaving me unable to say anything. When we slowly approached the classroom, I remembered my plan for the great management operation...and felt guilty that I was around Natsukawa like this after all. Maybe I should take a detour to the toilet after all—

"Ahh, found Sajocchi!"

.....Huh?

“...Kei?”

Ashida stormed out of the classroom, pointing at me. Following that, she dashed towards me, landing a harsh tackle—Wataru used jump! Nothing happened!

“Sajocchi! That Rin-sama is here for you!”

“...Huh?”

Can this event not happen this early in the morning? It's barely been two hours after I got up.

1 Otaku no Circle = Otasa. Otasa Hime/Princess = The only girl in a club full of boys.

Chapter 8: Guilty Yamazaki

The classrooms of class 2A and 2B were noisy. However, in front of our very own 2C classroom, absolutely silence reigned. Looking inside from the hallway, you could see most of our classmates already seated. In the center of that classroom, I spotted an unfamiliar back with their arms crossed.

However, the black ponytail hanging down the person's back was all too familiar to me, as I saw that just recently. It looked like a cute animal more than anything.

"Alright, forget about me, and just go on ahead, Ashida."

"No can do! I'm not letting you force me with some idiotic Ladies First principle!"

"Then, Natsu—"

"Huh?"

"Ah, I-I'm sorry..."

With Natsukawa giving me a 'Hurry up already' glare, I couldn't exactly force her to take the hit for me. I am your pet, thus order me whatever you please. As I was scouting out the situation inside the classroom, I happened to meet eyes with Senpai. Without wasting a breath, she immediately walked towards the exit of the classroom, opening the window in front of her.

"I thought you wouldn't come for the morning roll call."

"G-Good morning... Shinomiya-senpai."

"Yes, good morning...'Yamazaki'-kun." **Smirk.** "I was really surprised, you know? When I went to check out the first-year classrooms with Yuyu, I could only find a single boy called 'Yamazaki', see."

“No, you have the wrong idea about this, Senpai. He really exists. There is a phantom Yamazaki—”

“Sajou-kun.”

“Yes.”

“I’m waiting for you at the same place during lunch break.”

“Yes.”

With a frozen grin on her face, Shinomiya-senpai walked past me. Inatomi-senpai with her big red ribbon followed after. She showed me an apologetic expression, but stayed silent all the same. When I looked into the classroom, a monster fuelled by rage approached me.

“Sajouuuuu! You used me, you bastard!”

“Yamazaki...”

“Huuuh!? What do you want!?”

“Wasn’t...Shinomiya-senpai your type?”

“Ah...? I mean...I guess she is, yeah...”

“...Did you talk to her?”

“I sure did, but...”

“Good for you, Yamazaki.”

“...Yeah.”

With skilled communicative talent, I had Yamazaki shut up, and made him return to this seat in silence. Natsukawa looked at me with a suspicious expression, but eventually let up, and went to her own seat. She must have been tired from all this ruckus in the early morning. However, the same couldn’t be said about the girl next to me, looking at my face like I was the devil reincarnated.

“Sajocchi! Why was Rin-sama looking for you...!?”

“Some stuff happened, and she asked for my name...I thought that having the president of the public morals committee remember my name would be troublesome, so I just happened to blurt out a lie...”

“Moron! You already got a favor from her, and yet...!”

“What are you on about...”

Shinomiya Rin, the president of the public morals committee, is known as a cool beauty amassing skyrocketing popularity with boys and girls, but especially the female part of her fanbase is seeing her as a prince more than a girl. Seems like Ashida is one part of that, huh. Personally, I already have an idol that I'm satisfied with.

“Huh? That reminds me, you came with Aichi...?”

“Nah, we met in the hallway.”

“Huh, I see.”

I glanced over at Natsukawa, who already sat on her seat. She was resting her chin on her hands, seemingly out of energy. Alright, very cute. Also, sorry about my Sis and her folks.

That reminds me, besides me or Ashida, I rarely see Natsukawa talk and laugh together with someone else. Judging from the surroundings, there seem to be some students who are interested in talking to her, but...As long as I'm not with her, that should be resolved naturally.

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“Pizza steamed bun...?”

“Bought it at the school store.”

“You don't have any intention of apologizing, correct?”

“No no, I properly bought two of them. You must know what my intention is with this, right? Have one.”

“Yuyu is sitting right next to me.”

“Here you go, a spare triangular chocolate pie.”

“Spare...”

This was the student guidance counselling room. Right at the beginning of my interrogation, Shinomiya-senpai gave me an annoyed look. If you look at me like that, with you right in front of me in such a narrow room, I might just end up like Ashida. At the same time, Inatomi-senpai gave me a bewildered glance. I guess I don't look like a proper human being in her eyes.

I forced my presents onto Shinomiya-senpai, who pointed at an empty chair in front of her.

“Whatever, have a seat.”

“Understood, my queen.”

“You don't need to be that humble about it...But, sure.”

I sat down on the seat, and faced the two Senpais. This makes me feel like I'm participating in some job interview. Well, I'd probably be less nervous in that case.

“Now then, why did you lie to me, ‘Sajou’.”

Ohh, she's basically saying that I have no more chance of escaping. But, this'll be fine. Since Senpai has a straightforward and impulsive personality, I can figure out pretty much what she's going to say. That's why I'll be straightforward and honest with my own feelings as well.

“It felt like having the public morals committee president know my name would be nothing but trouble, so I reflexively blurted out my classmate's name instead.”

“Wha...!? I-I appreciate the honesty. However, you were just pushing the trouble onto your classmate.”

“It's fine, Yamazaki was happy.”

“I-I see...No, I still don't get it! Why would you hate it, and he likes

it!?”

I believe that would be quite embarrassing for Yamazaki if I had to say that. Well, whatever. In the end, he'll be happy about it either way, so heck it. Just when I was thinking that, I saw Inatomi-senpai showing an understanding nod.

“Seems like Inatomi-senpai knows what I’m talking about.”

“Y-Yesh...!? U-Um...!”

“Hey now, no scaring Yuyu, okay.”

“I’m terribly sorry.”

“I was joking, so why do you immediately apologize...”

Because I felt disgusted at myself for scaring such a cute and adorable little animal. If I didn’t apologize, I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night. I’m sorry for being a man. I’m sure that if I was a handsome guy, the reaction would be different. Reality is often disappointing.

“U-Um...! What should I even say...”

Her panicking is cute as well. I wonder who she’ll choose as her partner in the future. After punching that lucky guy in the face, I want to push his back so that they get married already.

“U-Um...Just as you said, Sajou-kun, I’m sure that Yamazaki-kun would be happy because Rin-san is so beautiful.”

“Wha...H-Hey! No need for awful jokes like that, Yuyu!”

“I-I’m not joking...”

“...I kind of feel bad now, Yamazaki.”

It almost seems like I’m using Yamazaki’s macho side in order to defuse Shinomiya-senpai’s anger by praising her, which she is clearly not used to. I’m not doing anything, though.

“Mmmgh...! A-Anyway, you can’t lie to others because of such a

reason, Sajou.”

“Alright...”

Since Shinomiya-senpai is beloved by many, a real normie you’d see everywhere, there’s no way she would understand how a lonely student sitting in the corner of the classroom would feel...is what I selfishly assumed, but seeing all these thriving reactions and emotions from her, that might not have been the case after all.

I’m aware of my average potential. My way of thinking is about as generic as it can get. Surely, most other ‘normal’ students would choose a similar way of handling things. Just as I used a fake name for convenience, she must have been avoiding this idea the entire time. Not because she’s the president of the public morals committee president, but rather because people who have no confidence in themselves genuinely fear direct contact with people greatly excelling them.

That’s especially the case with girls. Add together a beautiful appearance together with a strong mind, that’ll subconsciously create a wall towards the people around you, which is why less and less will deal with you.

Thinking that far, I can’t help but sympathize with Shinomiya-senpai after all. She might just be going through a kind of sadness that I can’t hope to understand.

“I’ll be more careful from now on. I’m very sorry.”

“Indeed, that you should.”

“Yes. Then, if you would excuse me.”

“Yeah, once another chance arises.”

“Indeed.”

“Eh...”

I’m honestly pretty grateful that I got to talk with a beauty like Shinomiya-senpai, but being in too much contact with the public

morals committee will just get me too much attention from the outside. Rather than dealing with normies, people in power are much more bothersome. A peaceful daily life is the most important. And, I thought I had been doing a solid in that, and yet I'm sitting here in the student guidance counselling room.

Maybe using a different name was a misjudgement after all...Wait, why did they even figure out that I used a fake name?

“—W-Wait...Please wait...!”

“!”

I heard a faint and desperate voice reach my ears. That voice clearly didn't belong to Shinomiya-senpai either, so I arrived at a single conclusion. And, as I turned around—My, cute...A high school girl with a ribbon is something like an endangered species nowadays. I need to treasure this, and protect—Of course, just joking.

Turning around, I saw Inatomi-senpai, forming a small fist in front of her chest. Shinomiya-senpai sat next to her, looking at the girl in shock.

“...Ah, I forgot.” The dear public morals committee president muttered.

“Senpai? I heard that just now.” I subconsciously threw in a retort.

Inatomi-senpai gave Shinomiya-senpai an annoyed glance, making me assume that there must have been some other business here unrelated to the lecture I just got. Well, not like Inatomi-senpai would need to be here for that. Should have figured that they went around searching for me...Alright, I got it.

“Then, if you would excuse me.”

“Now hold on a second!”

Right as I wanted to run away from the student guidance counselling room, Shinomiya-senpai grabbed onto me. Ehehe, I was caught. Then again, grabbing me instead of simply calling out to me is very much like Senpai.

“Hey...! Did you really try to walk away despite everything!?”

“Ehhh? Didn’t you keep me here, Senpai~?”

“No! Lecturing you wasn’t the main goal! Stop talking like that!”

I resigned myself after a half-baked joke attempt to run away, and sat down on my seat again. In response, Inatomi-senpai let out a relieved sigh. Ahh, I’m being healed just by watching her. Also, mental note. Jokes don’t work well with Shinomiya-senpai.

“Not the main goal?”

“That’s right, that’s why Yuyu is here.”

Because of Shinomiya-senpai’s words, I glanced over at Inatomi-senpai. I thought she’d be scared again, but she actually properly looked me in the eyes, despite her body quivering ever so slightly.

“Yuyu was always hung up on not accepting your kindness before, so she properly wanted to thank you now.”

“Thank me...? I didn’t even help her though?”

“Don’t be like that. Hear her out at least.” Shinomiya-senpai shrugged her shoulders, and looked at Inatomi-senpai again.

She indeed is cute, and I already feel like I’m being healed just by looking at her, but receiving her full attention is still pretty tense. I could see how Inatomi-senpai was trying her best to muster up her courage, carefully thinking about which words to choose, which led my tense feelings to vanish as well. Still, I feel like watching her from afar is much more relaxing than this up close.

“U-Um...back then...I’m sorry that I so rudely rejected your kindness, Sajou-kun.”

“Yep.”

“A-And also...thanks for calling out to me like that...!”

“...Yeah, don’t worry about it.”

I was a bit at a loss with these sudden serious words coming from Inatomi-senpai. After I accepted her feelings and nodded along, she showed a clear and relieved expression. What kind of living being is this, are you trying to kill me with your cuteness? I feel like another urge besides watching her is slowly building up inside of me.

“I’ll try my best to keep this pace going and fix my problem with boys!”

“.....”

.....Wat? I felt like a cold shiver running through my body. Even if that disposition can’t be helped in any way, that way of phrasing it is a bit...you know? I feel like I’ve started seeing Senpai in a different light. That was dangerous, I almost blurted out what I was thinking. I don’t want to say anything unnecessary here.

“...Yeah...this pace.”

“Yes! ...Eh.....?”

“Thank you for telling me about this. If another chance arises, I will talk with you again. Now then, if you would excuse me.”

“Why the rush? ...And yeah, just make sure that I don’t have to call you here again.”

“Right. Then, see you.”

Alright, time to head back to the classroom. And then, I’ll enjoy watching Natsukawa’s face to heal myself (*Hobby). Bend myself, compromise, and enjoy what I was given. The shell of being ‘normal’ I’ll break once I find something I want to do. Until then, I don’t feel like working for someone I don’t even know. That’s why, you all can do as you please.

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Two girls stepped out of the entrance of the school, hit with the outside air. They were facing the school grounds. Turning left of that was the wall where Wataru had regained his senses. In order to be together with Natsukawa Aika, to still chase after her, Wataru started

attending this Private Kouetsu High. It was a high-level school with a large gate and a prestigious flag.

The two girls stood in front of the ground, observing the school gate from the inside.

“It’s already summer, isn’t it. Weather’s growing warmer as well, right, Yuyu.”

“Yes...indeed.”

“...Yuyu?”

These two girls had just finished their conversation with a certain junior. Shinomiya Rin and Inatomi Yuyu told the boy everything they needed to, and lunch break came to an end—or, that’s how it should have been at least.

“What, trembling with excitement? It’s true that you’re bad at dealing with male students, but with that junior, it didn’t explode, did it.”

“Yes...comparing it to other boys, it wasn’t as bad.”

Just as Rin said, Sajou Wataru was a junior of theirs. When Yuyu was tormented because of her attitude towards him, and she found out that he was a junior, he made up her mind to apologize. Even after properly meeting him, and talking to him, witnessing his conversation with the public morals committee president Rin, Yuyu realized that he wasn’t a bad person.

“But...I feel like I said something that made him angry...”

“Something that made him angry?” Rin narrowed her eyes, showing a dubious expression.

Since she felt no sense of discomfort during that entire situation, she couldn’t help but be confused by Yuyu’s words.

“I don’t think you said anything odd, and it didn’t seem like Sajou was particularly angry...”

“Is...that so. It might have looked that way to you, Rin-san.”

“Hm...?”

Yuyu had trouble dealing with men, but she tried her best to be sincere, and keep eye contact. That’s why, she couldn’t help but think that he only accepted her apology and gratitude in order to get things over with.

“...I don’t really know how to explain it, but...Sajou-kun...looked at me with absolute boredom.”

“What...? That guy did?”

Of course, Yuyu didn’t feel terrified at this lack of interest by any means, as this allowed for easier and more sterile conversation, creating a bare minimum of passion that made it much easier for her in the end. However, receiving this kind of gaze from him right after broadly stating her plan to fix her fear and attitude towards men felt terribly cold.

“Ah, well...I’m sure it must just be my misunderstanding. He got along with Rin-san after all.”

“Hmm...”

This is only something Yuyu felt in her own subjective view. There’s no guarantee that Sajou Wataru actually thought of her as boring. As for Rin herself, she was thankful for his advice, and didn’t think of him as a bad student by any means. However, these words came from none other than Yuyu herself, so Rin couldn’t just stay silent.

“Don’t worry about it, Yuyu, you are cute.”

“W-Where did that come from...”

Rin embraced Yuyu from behind, gently caressing her head. She executed this new method she had learned just recently, doing it to those who looked up at her. Just pull them along, as Wataru said. And after that, leave it to her reliable partners. After a short time, a smile returned to Yuyu’s expression.

He who first suggests it should be the first to do it—Just like someone in the past had said, there's something more important that I should direct my attention towards right now.

I disregarded my own position, and directed my heart towards something that would forever be out of my reach. I don't think that this was a mistake, at least if it helped me arrange the environment I found myself in.

I'm sure that, even now, I'm reaching out for something that might be in my reach, but definitely isn't.

“...Ah! Sajocchi Sajocchi!”

“...?”

When I entered the classroom, Ashida beckoned me over with a quiet voice. I didn't know what she was on about, but I didn't hesitate and walked over.

“Look, look at that...!”

“?Wait, what...!?”

Ashida pointed at a single direction. There, I could see Natsukawa talk with a few female students. Not to mention that they weren't the crude type of girls who just acted as they pleased. They were all normal, and cute girls. Do I need to bring out the red rice to celebrate today?

“Phew...Not bad, Natsukawa.”

“Why do you sound like her dad? Ah...Zakki joined in as well.”

“I'll kill you, Yamazaki.”

“I don't think you're in any position to complain there, Sajocchi.”

Grrrr...it can't be helped. There's a few other girls around, so Yamazaki wouldn't act like the typical basketball player (*bias) and try to hit on Natsukawa. I'll overlook this, as the producer of Natsukawa...! Then again, not like I was doing anything...

“Oh yeah, did you not eat lunch with Natsukawa, Ashida?”

“Tried to. But, I gave her a wink, and let her take care of things.”

“Huh~”

I can already imagine the annoyed expression of Natsukawa when that happened. Personally, I feel like it'd be better to have Ashida next to Natsukawa as well...Would make it easier for the people around to start a conversation. Still, this is about what I expected. Natsukawa should really be in the center of people. I should have known, but she really isn't made out to be the person who would bother with someone like me...

“Why not join in as well, Ashida? I'll be on guard here.”

“What are you protecting...”

Ashida complained, but eventually still joined the group of people around Natsukawa. Thanks to that, everyone including Natsukawa smiled, and a comfortable atmosphere filled the classroom. I feel blessed being her manager. I can surely go for seconds tonight (*Average appetite).

I watched the scenery from the corner of the classroom, as the scenery in the classroom changed to something more peaceful. Just with that, the sweet bread I had with me was much more delicious. Indeed, I'm eating my lunch late as well.

Even to me, from further away, I could tell how the corner with Natsukawa was much more happy-go-lucky and fluffy. Would I have felt the same if I stayed there, or would it have been an uncomfortable sensation like when I was in the middle of Big Sis' group this morning?

Either way, this is the sight of Natsukawa that I wished for. Just by watching her from afar, I felt all the barriers inside of me, which kept me on edge, slowly breaking down.

Chapter 9: Student Council

I might like Natsukawa, but I definitely ain't got the hots for the summer¹. So many insects, the heat is killing me, there's literally nothing good about this. At least you can wear another layer of clothes in the winter to deal with the cold. Why is our classroom equipped with air conditioning, but we're not even using it? This dampness is killing me.

As I was internally groaning to myself, I felt my pocket vibrate. Taking out my smartphone, and checking the phone screen, this is what I was greeted with.

'You received one new message from Kaede.'

Man, I really don't want to open that. A message from Big Sis? Hasn't happened since like half a year ago, telling me to buy steamed buns on the way home. I got a really bad feeling about this.

No, it's fine. We're in the middle of class right now. She won't be able to complain if I quickly read but not respond. Especially her, who is attending a cram school, shouldn't be able to fault me for that—

'You received two new messages from Kaede.'

I was about to throw my phone. Not good, my phone screen already cracked once earlier this year. If I break it again, Mom will kill me. That is something I need to avoid at all costs. Is she telling me not to ignore her? Alright, I get it already.

'Oi? Hey.'

I didn't even say anything!? Is that really how you communicate nowadays? Jesus Christ, so much pressure without even saying anything. I swished the screen downwards, and confirmed the message before that one.

'Lunch break. Student council office.'

I mean, I get that I'm being called over, but...did she, like, grasp some weakness of mine? I don't see any reason why you could sound so demanding, but whatever. I sent a response.

'Better wait for your punishment.'

'Alright, I'll warm up my fist.'

Why is she preparing for a quarrel just like that? I really don't want to go right now. Are we really siblings? And how are these four handsome guys even clinging to her like that? She must have figured out a way to threaten them, right?

As I was glaring down at my smartphone, a shadow dropped down on my thighs.

"Sa~jou~kun~"

"I'm terribly sorry."

"That won't do."

Well, I guess this world wouldn't be as naive as that. With another earful from my teacher, I changed into an adult more and more.

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Where was the student council office again? With that thought in mind, I wandered around aimlessly. She only said lunch break, so it doesn't matter even if I end up a bit late. But then, I saw something odd in my view.

"That woman...!"

"....."

I spotted a female student, grinding her teeth as she looked inside the classroom in front of the window. From appearance alone, she looked like a gal, thanks to her blonde hair. Despite coloring her hair like that, her hairstyle was fairly docile. That gal-less part of hers brought forth a favorable impression. That being said, I'd rather not get involved with her. Blonde hair? I'll stand out next to her.

Also, can you not shake around your butt like that? Did you forget that we're inside a school? I mean, don't mind me, really.

However, when I looked above that suspicious girl, I saw a sign with 'Student council' written on it. How unlucky can I be, really...But, I need to get inside there no matter what. That is the order I received from my master—Oh wow, we're less like siblings and more like master and servant now, huh.

Either way, I need to get past this cute woman, and inside the student council office. Is there no method I could use? Non, cool, then let's go with this (*Immediate decision).

'There's some weird girl in front of the student council office, so I'm going home.'

Snitch, of course. Following that, I retreated from that place, heading to my favorite bench in the courtyard. Aren't I the strongest? I get back my peaceful lunch break, and leave everything to Big Sis instead. Goodbye, suspicious person that I surely will never see in my life ever again.

'Confirmed. Annoying. Warmed my fist.'

What is this, a case file. It feels like she's going to write a story about achieving revenge towards a person she held a years-long grudge for. That pressure from your message is way too strong. Is this because she started attending a cram school? Her talent has gone up drastically...!

And what, are you some otome game protagonist who earns hate and contempt from every rival girl around you by creating a reverse harem? Please, just don't wrap me up in this mess. Yeah, I should be safe, as I'm not as handsome as these guys...Right?

'Hey, we're done, so come back.'

Excuse me? What is 'done', Big Sis! How did you deal with her that quickly!

Making a swift decision is my motto. Rarely enough, Big Sis and I seem to resemble each other in that context. With a sigh, I turned

right around, making my way towards the student council office again. This time, the five members of the student council were already waiting for me.

“Hello everyone.”

“I’ll kill you.”

“Choice of words, vice-president.”

“Shut up.” Big Sis immediately walked back inside the office, while signaling me to follow a rough movement of her chin.

Looking at the feeble-type Senpai who was grumbling to himself, he showed a troubled smile. What kind of reaction is that, I’m gonna melt.

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“So, why did you call for me.”

“There’s way too many documents for the culture festival this fall that need organizing. Help me, will you. I wanted the help of a cat even, but I guess that you will have to do.”

“Don’t just put me below a cat...You ain’t got someone else you could ask?”

“You’re good with all the management work, right?”

“Huh?”

“Your part-time job. I know that you were faking your age to work.”

“Huh?”

That was back in middle school, a time where I did everything in order to get a better chance with Natsukawa Aika. To get the necessary funds for that, I would secretly work on Saturdays. When I wanted to quit to prepare for the entrance exams of this high school, they begged me to continue, even offering to raise my salary. In the end, I still quit because my parents were about to find out, seeing

that it was weird for an examinee to leave on Saturdays.

I thought I had kept it as secret, but to think Big Sis knew about that. So, she really grasped my weakness, huh...Kyaa~

“What’s this about? Your little brother was a delinquent, Kaede?”

“No, he’s a diligent and hardworking farmer.”

“We live in a town...”

When I gave the energetic-type Senpai—I think his name was Todoroki-senpai?—a response, the feeble-type handsome Senpai threw in a sharp retort. Looking at his name plate, it said ‘Hanawa’—Wait, Hanawa!? This sounds like something I heard before! I can smell the riches from here!

“B-Baby...”

“Shut up, and do this. I’ll treat you to some steamed buns later.”

“Two.”

“Of course?”

Eh, really...?

While receiving several explanations from the handsome Senpais around me, the talented-type second-year Senpai—Kai-senpai—gave me extremely careful treatment. He’s probably the type to speak polite even towards a junior...Maybe that’s just the default for him.

I figured that the K4 would always cling to Big Sis at any given moment, but every single one of them seemed fairly diligent about their work. Maybe that was also some kind of condition Big Sis gave them to call me here. With sweet bread in one hand, pen in the other, I worked on my duties, only for lunch break to slowly reach its end.

“—Right? Just as I told you.”

“Yeah...You were right. I can see why you were so confident, vice-president.”

“Ah, um...”

The cool-type handsome guy—Yuuki-senpai praised me. I kind of feel guilty for constantly avoiding Big Sis’ unreasonable demands. Then again, this time I couldn’t escape it.

“You’re not going to call me here again tomorrow, right?”

“Alright, I’ll buy you an erotic book of your choice. Big.”

“Big.”

Just what ‘Big’ she talking about? Does she know my interests...? If so, then how? That’s hella scary. Isn’t she a bit too well-informed about her younger brother? No, hold on. Do girls have such a woven network of information over anybody? JKs are scary, their destined profession must be a spy or something.

“Counting on you tomorrow.”

“Aye aye.” I gave a resignful response.

It’s definitely not like I was won over by that ‘big’ thing she was talking about. Rather, I saw that someone needed my help, so I could only lend her my strength...! For that sake, I will do this job given to me! (*Cold eyes)

We split up in front of the student council office, and I made my way back to the classroom. Coincidentally enough, the talented-type handsome guy Kai-senpai happened to walk in the same direction, so we went together. Since practically all of the student council members were giants compared to me, I’d honestly rather not walk next to them, though...

“Kaede-san was worried about you, Wataru-san.”

“...Eh?” My shoulders twitched in shock as he suddenly spoke up.

Because of this, and the contents of his sentence, my head turned blank. Is this some kind of illusion? I must be tired from the (*30 min) work.

“Is there something characteristic that a boy in his first year of high school could worry about?” she asked me, and I was honestly at a loss.”

“She probably thought it was something related to my puberty.”

“I wouldn’t have expected it to be about her younger brother. I thought she might have fallen in love with a first-year.”

So that’s why the entire student council greeted her that morning. And, I can see why Todoroki-senpai got all agitated, as well as why Kai-senpai would be so curious about my relationship with her. They thought I was their rival in love, huh.

“Might not have made it in time, probably my fault’, she added.”

“Can she not treat me like I died already? It’s definitely not too late for me.”

“That’s how Kaede-san felt, though.”

“Huh? What’s that about...”

Some puberty-related issues...Well, that might just be the case. From an onlooker’s point of view, a high school student is still a child, but there’s often times where you would convince yourself that you’re an actual adult now. If you don’t devote yourself to that thought, you’ll be hit by the difference between the fantasies you imagined, and the reality waiting to hit you in the face.

I wonder, was I knocked down like that? It’s not like I’m falling into despair or anything, I just feel embarrassed after objectively looking at what I’ve done so far. Maybe even thinking about this shows that I’m still in my puperby. But, this being her fault? Why would she feel that way?

“But, I don’t think what Kaede-san said is wrong. You have the eyes of someone who gave up already.”

“You don’t need to talk to me like some old wrinkly man who gave up on life.”

“Kaede-san said it in the way that ‘At least our eyes resemble each other’s’, you see. However, I don’t feel that way. I’m even doubting the fact that you are her younger brother.”

“I never thought we really resembled each other to be honest.”

Back in grade school, seeing how Big Sis was acting, I was shocked that she had this many friends. I figured that it must have been exhausting to deal with so many people. She herself said that it happened all naturally, but...to me, it just felt like we weren’t similar at all, despite being siblings.

After that, I spend my days and years chasing after Natsukawa. I feel like my head was always full of Natsukawa that I didn’t have any more room to even think about my puberty and all that. Because I was always up in the clouds, or blinded by love, I never thought about anything serious like that. I guess that might be the case why it happened late now.

Now that I think about it, I feel like I was always a bit of a cheeky guy back in grade school. I might have possessed a much more realistic outlook on life that I had all the way through middle school until recently.

“When Big Sis talks nonsense like that again, tell her ‘I just got a manly look in my eyes now’.”

“I see, that might be the only part that you two resemble each other in.”

“It’s not the only part, our DNA overlaps.”

“Blunt to the point...”

What if our DNA wasn’t similar either? Maybe our parents are different after all...That would make me a follower of hers as well. I really don’t want that. No no, I’m sure our hair whorl must be similar.

“Well, this is probably a delicate time for me as well.”

“Fufu, I’m sure that your sister must want to witness the changes you

go through.”

“Don’t you wish that this kind of attention would be directed at you Senpais instead? I don’t think it’s very nice of her to ignore all these handsome guys just for her younger brother.”

“Oh my, you say some wonderful things. Let me reevaluate you.”

If anything, how were you seeing me until now? Also, could you stop showing that fishy expression every time the name of my Big Sis pops up? Dudes who show a kind expression with ulterior motives are the scariest, especially if they’re handsome. I feel like Kai-senpai is the type to immediately blow a fuse once he ends up in a bad mood, starting a quarrel with about anybody...Best be careful, alright.

“Then, I’ll be taking my leave here.”

“Yes, see you again.”

Right as we headed to the third floor, we split up. The atmosphere that remained after I watched him walk off gave me the aftertaste of an illusion as if we had talked about something extremely clever just now. On top of that, I felt this odd sense of superiority just by having talked with a handsome guy like him. Though, I don’t know why. Handsome guys sure are crazy, maybe this could be the saving strength for someone in this world (*Vague).

“...Oh?

As I made it back to the classroom of my class 2C, I could pick up a bit of noise inside. Since the door was open, I took a peek inside, only to smile to myself at the scenery greeting me.

...Yep. As expected, Natsukawa was the center of attention, surrounded by several boys and girls. I’m feeling a bit conflicted that there’s more boys now as well, but Natsukawa Aika is an idol, so it can’t be helped. But, don’t you dare touch her, Yamazaki, or I will murder you...!

“Wahhh, is this your little sister, Natsukawa-san?”

“So cute!”

Seems like the topic at hand was Natsukawa's little sister. She was pointing at her phone, showing a slightly embarrassed reaction. Yup, what a goddess. Oh yeah, she did have a little sister. Since she was three years old when we were in our second middle school year, she must be around five now. Almost in grade school, huh. Not like I ever met her before. I don't wanna bring that up in front of Natsukawa-san, I'm scared.

"Having a cute little sister must be great...Hey Natsukawa-san, can I come meet her?"

"E-Ehh!? Y-You wanna visit my place...!?"

Ohhh...!? That's the cozy-type of girl, Shirai-san! She's more aggressive than I thought! The way Natsukawa ended up flustered is great as well! More, Shirai-san! Attack her more!

As I was thinking that, more people moved towards Natsukawa's seat, which made me stand out more in the process. As a few students already caught on to me lurking, it didn't take long for Ashida and Natsukawa to look over at me.

"Ah, Sajocchi! Look at this! It's Aichi's little sis! She's so cute!"

"Ohh, makes me want to gulp her up."

"Sajocchi..."

Ashida held Natsukawa's phone, coming all the way over here to show it to me. Ahh, what an angel. She'll definitely grow up to become a beauty like Natsukawa. If I had a little sister like her, a single hug could blow away all the exhaustion from a single day... But, is this going to be okay? Natsukawa won't get angry at me for this, right.

"We're all talking about visiting Aichi's place sometime!"

"I don't think my level is high enough for that."

"Natsukawa-san's place isn't some dungeon..." The soccer club member Sasaki gave me an annoyed retort.

Not bad, punk. Is that how you win your soccer games as well? Also, 'all' of you...?

"With these numbers?"

"H-Hmpf...! I'm not letting you get close to anywhere near Airi, otherwise she might be negatively influenced in some way!"

"Haha, you're probably right."

"Eh..."

If I had such a cute little sister, I wouldn't let any guy like me get close to her either. Especially peeps like Yamazaki or Sasaki, you bastards won't even get a glimpse of her in a picture and what am I even saying?

Well, I only got Big Sis with me...I wouldn't even be greedy enough for a little sister, but I really wanted a younger brother (*Greedy)...I heard that if you overcame that Onii-chan status, you'd be pretty popular with the little sister-type girls...But wait, doesn't mean I would have to cross the line with my actual little sister...Hmm, sounds complicated.

As I was thinking about some ridiculous stuff, I remembered that I'll have to help with the student council from now on. Ahh, that already sounds exhausting...I don't think I'll be able to become an adult. Before getting enough XP, my HP are going to run out...

"Hey, lunch break already ended. Go sit down already."

"Urk, it's Sensei."

"What do you mean 'Urk'? Say that again, will you."

Our math teacher Hasebe-sensei walked into the classroom, only to receive annoyed glances from the group around Ashida and Yamazaki.

"Come on, Sajocchi, he got angry at you!"

"Don't make it my fault."

“...So, Sajocchi?”

“Hmm?”

“...No, it’s nothing.”

“...?”

I don’t know what that was about, but at least she didn’t annoy me. What’s wrong, Ashida, you got a change of heart, and you’re not acting kindly towards the corner-of-the-classroom-type (not handsome) boy? That’s the best news all day.

As for Natsukawa, I’m great that things are making progress. It’s reassuring to know that my efforts weren’t in vain. For things that are out of my control, like that suspicious girl in front of the student council office, I should just leave that to someone else. I feel like Big Sis was oddly worried about me, but this isn’t a problem at all, no.

In the end, I’m a guy who’s as average as it gets, not standing out at all.

¹ Natsukawa’s *Natsu* means summer.

Chapter 10: The Origin of that Discomfort

Classes ended, and I desired new pioneering grounds—some light novel to read, basically. Since my head was full with Natsukawa for the past few years, I had a lot of new releases to catch up on. I'll buy some, and enjoy the steamed buns Big Sis bought for me while reading them. Self-indulgence is God.

“H-Hey...”

“...Oh, yeah what's up?”

Right as I wanted to make my way home, Natsukawa forcefully made me stop, to which I turned towards her. Wait, she didn't even say my name, so maybe she didn't even talk to me...Luckily, she was actually looking at me, so I was saved an embarrassing mistake and moment.

“Um, Natsukawa? What's wrong? Why're you panicking?”

“I-I'm not panicking or anything!”

“Ohhhokay...”

I mean, she came all the way over here to stop me from going home the second I got up from my chair. Not to mention that our seats are pretty far away. Was that some kind of quick-step? Did she want to talk to me that badly? Oh come on, I'm just joking.

“S-Say...are you really not coming...?”

“Coming...? What are you—”

“Would you look at that, your final roll call ended already.”

“Huh...?”

My words were interrupted by a deep, wide-ranging voice. Of course,

I was talking about a deep level of a girl, like a dignified one, you know? That's why I could immediately figure out who I was dealing with.

“Kya, Rin-sama...!?”

Not to mention that Ashida raised a happy shriek. As it turns out, Shinomiya Rin-senpai was peeking inside the classroom. Right as our gazes overlapped, she broke out in a smile—Wait, smile!? Did I switch bodies with Big Sis? Two beauties come to me after classes with some business with me!? Did I suddenly turn into the protagonist? W-Which one should I choose, Ashida!?

“...I don't know the details, but I can tell you're thinking something stupid.”

“Can you not calmly analyze my thought process?”

You damn data specs-type girl...! Don't just crush a boy's heart who just thought he got a bit of luck in life!

“Hey there. I know that it must have been a rough day, but can I borrow Sajou for a bit longer?”

“P-P-P-Please go ahead! Boil him, burn him, expose him on social networks, do however you please!”

“Ashidaaaa!”

The third one sounded much more cruel than the first two! Don't try to get more fame on Insta by making me suffer! Eh? The tweeting one? What are you going to do if I suddenly went viral! I need to change my hair soon...!

I was playing around, trying my best to not look Shinomiya-senpai in the eyes, and turned towards Natsukawa.

“Sorry about that. What were you saying, Natsukawa?”

“N-Nothing at all! Just go already!”

“Your wish is my command!”

“...What kind of relationship do you two even have...”

When I looked at Shinomiya-senpai with a ‘Right?’ gaze, she just showed a troubled expression. I’m sorry, I was feeling a bit comfortable today because of everything that happened...Please, just let me play a bit long—actually, can I just go straight home instead? This sounds mighty terrifying.

What kind of business would Shinomiya-senpai have with me anyway? That case with Inatomi-senpai is already over, so what else would she...

“Let’s change the location.”

“...?”

“.....”

As I was pulled out of the classroom, I could feel the saddened and lonely gazes of Natsukaw and Ashida hitting my back (*Imagination).

*

“—Here, huh.”

“Here, yes.”

The student guidance counselling room, yet again. This normally is a location where people breaking public morals get brought to in order to receive a round of lecturing or even a punishment. It is equally a room used by people who achieved a higher position in one of the committees.

“I’m slowly getting tired of being stared at by students and teachers alike.”

“Heh, no need to worry about the chirping from your surroundings.”

“Chirping.”

That definitely isn’t the word I would expect, but by lord is it cool. How can she be a cooler man than me, a man himself. Also, I’m

surprised that she isn't clinging to the teachers in this case. I figured that someone from the public morals committee would definitely be on the school's side.

"So, what did you want?"

"First, let me thank you. Because of your advice, Yuyu has been making rapid progress. I learned that you can't solve everything just by snuggling up to her."

"Is that so. I didn't know if my subjective words would have any kind of value, but I'm glad I could be of help."

"Yeah, you were of great help. You have the strength to support other people, I can tell you."

"No, it's really not that big of a deal."

That is quite the high evaluation to get for something like this. I don't think I did anything deserving of that...You never know what helps other people, I guess. Still, maybe something else might have happened to Inatomi-senpai. From the looks of it, she seems fairly weak towards any kind of trouble, so I don't want her to get hurt in any way. Makes me want to give her something sweet to eat. Like Japanese sweets. That'd be the best.

"—That's why I got even more confused about you."

".....Excuse me?"

Just as her name suggested¹, she gave me a very dignified and closely-inspecting look. Because of this unexpected development, I could only avert my gaze. Ah, my back hit the wall. Isn't this wall too narrow? Is this some confinement cell?

"You see, Yuyu was pretty dejected about failing to make you understand where she was coming from."

"Ehh? Um...what are you talking about? Wasn't her goal to 'Fix her misconception towards men'? I think that's wonderful."

"I agree. However, that's not the point here."

“No, but...”

Shinomiya-senpai approached me even further, deeply gazing into my eyes. Pushed against the wall, I couldn't even avert my gaze from her. What is this? This feels like the few moments right before I get vaccinated at the doctor. Are we still not done yet, Mom?

“Hmm...Sajou.”

“W-What might be the problem?”

“I'm quite interested in your real feelings.”

“No, I wasn't lying or anything...”

“Back then, I didn't catch on the problem between you and Yuyu. However, now I can tell. Now, your eyes look different compared to the time you gave me advice.”

“...That's.”

...What? Why is everybody so obsessed with my eyes? They're perfectly normal eyes. Since I'm perfectly average, they shouldn't cause much offence. Why do they all keep hammering me about it? Are you saying that I can't read the mood? I easily accept what other people are saying, so I want others to listen to me. Yet, why is everyone so noisy as of late.

Maybe because I had already been on edge, I grew a bit more emotional, and revealed what I truly felt.

“—I was annoyed at Inatomi-senpai's irrational reason to be scared.”

“...Don't you think that maybe she experienced something in the past that made her feel this way?”

“Oh I'm sure. However, if she keeps sweeping away her problem of dealing with men because of this as an excuse, then she won't be able to move forward.”

“...Continue.”

No matter what, I can't but sound condescending towards Inatomi-senpai. Every time I do that, Shinomiya-senpai's shoulders twitch, but she doesn't seem to have any intention of interrupting me.

"I don't think that Inatomi-senpai really apologized for my sake. If anything, it felt calculated. 'I would have started to hate myself if I ignored someone else's kindness because of my negative disposition' seemed to be her intention, if you ask me."

"Are you angry because of that?"

"Not at all. If anything, I admire her from the bottom of my heart. The problem is what came after. Inatomi-senpai used this incident as a stepping stone, and spoke with a nuance as if she was currently working hard to solve her problem."

"....."

I know that what I'm saying sounded cold-hearted. Currently, the president of the public morals committee was looking down at me, while I was practically complaining about her good friend. I don't know why, but even her sharp gaze that I felt in the beginning started to not bother me anymore.

"—However, if that really was the case, Inatomi-senpai shouldn't have brought Shinomiya-senpai with her."

"...!"

Inatomi-senpai is bad at dealing with men. Despite trying to fix that, she took a step backwards, and ran away from me, only to return to zero again by apologizing. However, by bringing Shinomiya-senpai with her as an ally, the initial fear and later resulting courage didn't match up. Instead of taking a step forward, she went even further backwards.

"I was just thinking 'The hell is she talking about', that's all."

"...I see."

Thinking purely with logic, I'm certain that my argument here is correct. However, with a normal ruler, that might change. In the end,

I'm the one who's wrong. Nobody would think too deeply about their own actions or words, at least not in high school. In the end, I just evaluated my Senpai too highly, and was disappointed, that's all.

"You're quite severe, aren't you."

"Not really. I only have respect for Inatomi-senpai as the mascot she is."

"Agreed. If anything, that's about all I can see her as."

Excuse me? I know I might sound harsh here, but should you really be saying that? Weren't you friends? Colleagues?

"But, I see...To me, she is nothing like a cute junior at best, but for you, she plays the role of an important and reliable senior..."

"Yes, that might be the case. Though, fellow classmates of mine might not be thinking the same thing."

"I see..." Shinomiya-senpai narrowed her eyebrows in a troubled fashion.

Inatomi-senpai has this blinding cuteness to her. Not as much as Natsukawa though.

"Senpai, you really treasure Inatomi-senpai a lot."

"Of course, but it's not just her. Sajou, you are another junior I set my eyes on."

"Ehhh? The public morals committee president has a problem with me?"

"Hey now, that kind of phrasing sure hurts, okay."

That's definitely not normal, is it? I'm a first-year brat, known in both the student council and public morals committee. This isn't normal, so somebody save me.

However, Shinomiya-senpai didn't have anything more to say, and before she could come up with something, I quickly left the student

guidance counselling room. Turning around one last time, I saw Senpai deeply in thought about something. I however decided to ignore that.

*

Even if I was called over by Big Sis, who would purposefully make their way to the student council office? Rationally thinking, only people who have business there, or friends close to the student council members...No, there's one more person. A stalker.

"...That woman...!"

There she was, that suspicious girl taking peeks inside the student council office. She's here again today...Even muttering the same words again. Should you really be stalking around like this despite looking like a gal? Anyway, time to get out my phone.

'Do you want me to stay away from the student council office that badly!? I didn't know you kept a bodyguard! I'm leaving!'

I said.

‘~~~~♪’

"Ah."

"This close to—Eh?"

I forgot that I didn't have my phone on silent. As a result of that, my phone let out a loud sound, which got the attention from the girl in front of the student council office. Eh? She looked like a gal, but now that I got a better look at her, she seems actually pretty prim and proper...If anything, high-grade. Then again, the second she had her butt turned towards me, she's a pervert.

"....."

"....."

She stared at me in disbelief. I'm the one who's supposed to be shocked here.

‘Huh? That’s ten more pages’, or so Big Sis said in her message.

So what, am I supposed to just shove her away? What should I do about this...!

“...W-What do you want?”

No, nothing rea—Wait a damn second!? That tone of speaking...isn’t that pretty rare? Looking at her, she doesn’t seem to be Japanese...A half maybe? Ohohohohoho²!

“Nothing at all, my dear lady.”

“Ara, is that so. I-I just happened to pass here, that’s all.”

My tone of voice happened to end up a bit creepy out of shock, but luckily that young lady didn’t realize that. Following that, she walked past me with some crazy elegant and almost sophisticated laugh, and disappeared. After waiting for her to be gone entirely, I entered the student council room. Normally I would have sent her another message, but knowing that Big Sis of mine, I figured she’d make me do even more work that way.

*

“So, what’s the problem with that blonde-haired girl?”

“Huh? She your type or something?”

Asked by Big Sis, I now realized that I never gave it much thought... Mm, I guess that her face wasn’t half bad. Judging from her way of speaking, she seemed to be doing well in the money category as well...In the end, it’s just my personal impression, but with blonde hair standing out that much, she’s probably my number one type of girl I’d rather not get too close to.

“Keep, please.”

“Look at the mirror.”

“Wahahaha, how sharp!”

Seems like Todoroki-senpai enjoyed that exchange. Maybe I'm not fit to be an office worker. Also, look at that guy's desk, barely any files left. Maybe he was speedster Mc. Speedy.

"Sorry about Marika, Wataru."

"Ah, yes, what?"

Yuuki-senpai suddenly joined in on the conversation. He must have heard us, and first named the girl, only to then even call me by my given name. It felt so normal that it took me by surprise. Aren't they friendly. Hanawa-senpai seemed to have enjoyed that exchange, as he delivered an explanation.

"She is Hayato's fiancé."

"Hey, Renji."

"Huh.....What?"

Huuuuuh!? Fiancé!? That kind of system still exists in this world!? And if so, is Yuuki-senpai rich as well!? You wouldn't get a fiancé any other way, right? Out of shock, I glanced over at Big Sis, who was resting her head on her hand, grumbling as she worked on her papers. Doesn't seem like she's much interested if you ask me.

But, now everything makes sense. Since she's Yuuki-senpai's fiancé, she is practically his girlfriend, clearly not satisfied with how things are right now. That's why she's resenting Big Sis like that. Still, what kind of academy drama rival character is this? Also, is it really fine for me to joke about this? Someone suffering real harm wouldn't be funny at all.

"Properly keep the reins on her, will you."

"Y-Yeah...I'll bear it in mind."

I wonder how Yuuki-senpai himself feels about this whole fiancé relationship. No, not like I really care. No matter what his personal feelings may be, a single relationship or not won't change society. Even if their families may be a bit wealthy to still use the fiancé system, they wouldn't have that much influence. This isn't some

academy TV drama. Just don't let this influence our family, Yuuki-senpai. I'm trusting you.

"Hah, I can kick her out no problem."

Big Sis must have felt what I was thinking, as she captivatingly crossed her legs, turning her face towards us, which was brimming with confidence. Damage? Yeah, what's that? Is there even an existence in this world that can damage this gorilla? I feel like I was just wasting my energy here. Her surroundings might seem like a fully-fledged academy drama, but the protagonist in question isn't about that. She's more of the battle-type high school girl, huh...

"Big Sis, I'm done."

"...Quite fast."

"Take care of some more then."

Right as I was preparing to head back to the classroom, more documents were slammed down on my desk. Big Sis...You drowned out all that praise coming from Yuuki-senpai, you know that? Aren't you treating me a bit too differently despite us being blood-related?

"...Hey."

"....."

"You. Yes, you."

"Ah, me?"

Since she suddenly spoke up, I didn't think she was actually talking to me. I mean, 'you' doesn't necessarily mean she's referring to me... Well, I'm probably the only person she refers to as such in this group.

"What happened with that girl? That Natsukawa-san."

"Ohh? 'That girl' before? Your younger bro's girlfriend?"

"Huh, that's unexpected."

Now hold on a damn second. We're talking about that right here? Is this some kind of public execution? And, Big Sis definitely knows, which is why she's asking that. She must be curious if there was some kind of development. That damn female gorilla...! And don't glare at me like that!

"I am her devoted male servant."

"Huh, so you're together every day."

"I mean...from afar."

"You ***** bastard."

"Wanna fight?"

Even if you're my older sister, I won't let this stand. Despite that, I can only see myself losing a hundred times more than I could dish out. Since I don't want any of the people present getting the wrong idea about my relationship with Natsukawa, I carefully explained everything.

"You saw her face and appearance, right? She's wasted on me." I quoted as an example.

There's probably no better argument than this. Looks! Efforts! Personality! I cannot compare in anything!

"Huh? You won't know until you try, right?"

"I've tried it for the past two years."

"That girl...is the one you were trying to woo over before, right?"

"I wasn't really."

"You totally were."

I totally—**was**, yeah. Thanks to that, I can now live a reserved life. Because of me being aware about my own specs and abilities, things have gotten along fairly smoothly...Not counting this ridiculous situation right now! There's the saying of 'dominating your husband',

but I don't think she'll stop dominating me even after getting married. If I didn't know any better, I'd think she would use me as a chair next. And yet, the big brother inside my head would be very happy about that, I wonder why.

“—And so, after being rejected you lost all your energy.”

“Huh...?”

It felt like someone stabbed me in the chest. Because of this unfair and unreasonable attack, I felt the blood rush to my head. Subconsciously, I raised my chin, and glared at Big Sis.....No, calm down. It's the truth that I was spending my days chasing after Natsukawa. No need to get angry at that now.

“...Right, I got rejected tens of times.”

“Tens...You confessed to her so many times?”

“Yeah, I'm being totally serious, no jokes. It's crazy right? Not even knowing where I was at.”

See! Now you should understand how serious I was! I'm not the kind of man who would break down after a single time! Though that was mainly because I wasn't aware of my own specs...

“—Even though you and Mom always told me about it...”

“...!!”

Disgusting, unpopular, idiot, moron. Kicks and punches from Big Sis, an iron fist right into my gut. Wait a second, why does Big Sis have such a wide arsenal of techniques? What is she, some all-round fighter. What's next, a sword? Dear lord help me.

“I-Isn't this enough? Lunch break is about to end, so I'm going back. I'm sure you Senpais must have it rough, but I have great respect for you.”

“Y-Yes...Right back at you, Wataru-kun.”

W-Wha, Kai-senpai, can you not start tearing up like that? Being

treated like some unfortunate child will just make me, an average guy, sad as well! Just forget about villager A and keep chasing after Big Sis!

With both looks and personality, they're handsome. Appearance is the utmost outer layer of your inner face, as I often say. Interacting with them, that became even more apparent. Because of that, when I walked outside in the hallway, and inspected my face in the glass windows, it made me want to spit at the reflection. Not like I was gonna do that.

1 Her name literally means dignified

2 You get what character trait he's playing at, right

Chapter 11: The Goddess is Absorbed

I don't get it. I don't get it at all. Wataru, myself, and everybody else. Why do I have to feel this irritated and gloomy? It's all that guy's fault.

We switched seats in the classroom. I ended up a seat behind me, and that guy ended up in the very front, the seat right next to the hallway. I was happy and relieved to know that things would be a bit more quiet now, and I was looking forward to him being called out by the teacher more.

So, why? Why does it feel so uncomfortable? I'm sitting on my seat, not bothering anybody. I talk with people if I feel like it, and am alone when I feel like it. I'm doing exactly as I please, and yet...?

Kei ended up right behind that guy, and from day one, she started talking more and more with him. When I saw him getting annoyed, I realized that he really treated me in a special way. But, that was only the case in the beginning.

He's got someone he knows close to him. That's why it makes sense that they would talk more frequently, and get along. However, I don't have anybody like that around me. That's why Kei would often make time to talk to me. Especially during recess, which brightens up my mood a lot. There's even other people slowly starting to talk to me. At the same time, that guy started talking to me less.

One day when I was walking to school, he happened to be in front of me. Out of a whim, I called out to him. I panicked, but he kept walking on ahead almost like he didn't hear me. I got a bit annoyed at that, and grabbed him by the collar, only for his face to appear right in front of me. I mean, who wouldn't be surprised at that? I happened to shove my bag onto him because I didn't know how else to react.

‘What a harsh way of showing your affection...

‘W-What are you talking about!? There’s no way that—’

We finally talked again. Wataru’s idiotic comments and words had me speak more sharply as well. This exchange felt warm and comfortable, and even as I was insulting him, I felt my mouth slowly change shape into a smile. And yet, Wataru turned his back towards me, almost as if to forcefully break up the conversation.

Wait.

I could have just said that, and yet whenever I’m dealing with Wataru, I end up doing everything much more forcefully. There, for the first time, I saw something like anger in his expression. Since this never happened before, I grew scared, and could only respond in a quiet voice. We did walk to school together after that, but we barely spoke anything...and for some reason, I couldn’t really motivate myself to do anything that day.

A few days later, there were some suspicious seniors on my way to school. They stood on both sides of the street, which left me too scared to walk past them, when that guy and his older sister appeared. Unlike him, she’s actually calm and very cool...For a second, I doubted if they were actually related by blood, but seeing that guy’s tactless attitude, it felt like really were brother and sister. I wouldn’t want it to escalate like that, but maybe I could build up a relationship similar to it with Airi as well.

Because of that odd situation, we just somehow ended up walking to school together, but it’s been a few days since I actually talked to that guy. Like our previous conversation had been a lie, it was the same usual Wataru. But, why would he act like I was some cold-hearted girl...There’s no way I’d just leave him behind mid-way on our way to the classroom. And, even if my face might be cool and attractive, I don’t think people would fall in love with me that easily...P-Probably.

I got a bit angry at that guy, and walked to the classroom, when Kei practically leaped at me. She talked about the public morals committee president Shinomiya-senpai being angry or something...

W-What did you do now, Wataru?

Apparently, he gave Shinomiya-senpai a wrong name when she asked for his. Not to mention ‘Yamazaki’...did he do that on purpose because we have Yamazaki-kun in our class? Why is he just using other people’s names...

As for Shinomiya-senpai, she’s known as a reliable and attractive girl. Even Kei was staring at Senpai with hearts in her eyes. At the same time, second-year Inatomi-senpai was with her as well. I don’t know if I should be saying that as someone younger as her, but she really is cute. It makes me want to hug her, and pat her on the head.

Wataru made a promise to meet up with the Senpais during lunch break, and when that time rolled around, he really left the classroom, albeit looking not exactly excited about it. Our other classmates saw him off with a round of laughter...H-Hm, doesn’t seem like anything that guy would enjoy...Maybe he’ll get an earful for giving Senpai a wrong name...But, why were they even looking for him in the first place?

I feel like it’s been a long time since Wataru was actually the center of attention in class. It seemed like he had calmed down a bit as of late, but maybe not really. That’s what Shirai-san commented at least. Really, whatever that guy does, it never ends well.

Right as that guy came up as a topic, a few girls of the class came talking to me.

“So...Natsukawa-san. Sajou-kun isn’t talking to you much as of late, did something happen?”

“Eh...” I was baffled.

For a second, I thought they were asking me a question along the lines of what Kei did to Aizawa-san, but thinking about it, we weren’t even going out, and the fact that that guy has feelings for me is no secret either. I shouldn’t think about it too deeply, I don’t think Shirai-san asked it with any deeper implications either.

“N-Nothing, really. He seemed to be busy as of late, and we also

ended up further away because of the seat change.”

“Ah... I see. I’m glad. So you’re not fighting, right...?”

Urk, so dazzling...I can tell that Shirai-san was earnestly worried about me and that guy. Why can she worry about others like this... It’s not like that guy and me aren’t even that close.

“T-That’s right. I’m also busy taking care of my little sister.”

“Waahh...Natsukawa-san, you have a little sister? How old is she? Do you have any other siblings?”

“Urk...”

For some reason, the topic at hand switched drastically, and now Shirai-san plus some other girls were asking me even more questions. I-I’m not used to this...What am I supposed to do!? In a panic, I took out my smartphone, opened up my secret Airi folder, and showed it to the girls. Looking at this, the girls’ eyes started sparkling in excitement, chanting ‘Cute cute cute’, agonizing over it. D-Don’t scream like that, the other boys are still here...!

Until Kei came to provide support, this continued. Thanks to Airi as the trigger, I became able to talk with the people around me. Shirai-san actually had a younger brother, who would always go to tease her.

When I said ‘Shirai-san is really kind, so if you were my older sister, I’d imagine you would forgive me anything’, she let out a flustered laugh. She’s so cute...But, talking about siblings, I was reminded of Wataru’s older sister. She seemed very stylish and cool, and pretty kind...but I don’t know if she’d be the type to enjoy pranks.

Sasaki-kun from the soccer club has a little sister as well. Despite her being in middle school, she would still sometimes sleep in the same bed as him, with no rebellious phase in sight. Isn’t it better if that phase never comes? Then again, Sasaki-kun is pretty good-looking and reliable, so I can see why his little sister would like him that much. I’d love an Onii-san like him. Wataru...probably not.

Lunch break came around. As of late, it sort-of became the normality for me to eat lunch with the other girls around. It feels much more comfortable than being pressed down one-sidedly by that guy. Thanks to him, I even know which angle would show me best during a picture...N-Not like I'm thankful or anything!

As always, the conversation would revolve around my little sister Airi. They'd urge me to show more pictures, and since I didn't mind it at all, I swiftly took out my smartphone and showed them my folder. I was practically bragging about my little sister, only to realize that more and more people filled my surroundings...Eh, hold on, isn't this too many?

My smartphone was being handed around to everybody who wanted to take a look, like they were lining up to watch a movie. Ah, I'm not too comfortable with the boys...! Don't touch it in any weird way! And keep the folder safe!

I felt a bit anxious, when Shirai-san seemed like she couldn't hold back any longer, and directly approached me.

"Having a cute little sister must be great...Hey Natsukawa-san, can I come meet her?"

"E-Ehh!? Y-You wanna visit my place...!?"

Out of shock, I blurted this out with a loud voice. The only people that visited my home before were Kei and other members of the volleyball club. Since I only barely started talking to them, I didn't even think of inviting them over. Not knowing what to do, I subconsciously started looking for Kei. H-Huh...? She was with me just a second ago...Where is she now? Ah, she's holding my phone, walking towards...Eh, Wataru?

Kei and Wataru exchanged a few words, and walked towards me. He seemed pretty interested. I think this might be the first time I've seen such a curious expression on him.

"We're all talking about visiting Aichi's place sometime!"

"I don't think my level is high enough for that."

“Natsukawa-san’s place isn’t some dungeon...”

That’s right, what kind of place do you think my home is? Even Sasaki-kun retorted on that nonsense...Maybe that guy really isn’t normal. With these thoughts in mind, I observed my surroundings, and caught onto one thing. Everybody was around me. Even Kei... and Wataru.

“...Ah...”

I could tell that my chest started to warm up. I’m being surrounded by everyone. It felt comfortable, and made me wish that this would continue forever. Because I was feeling this gleeful, I must have gotten careless.

“With these numbers?

“H-Hmpf...! I’m not letting you get close to anywhere near Airi, otherwise she might be negatively influenced in some way!”

The same as always. That was the intention I had when talking to Wataru, but for some reason the people around us started to laugh. H-Hey...we’re not some comedic couple. This isn’t what it seems...! Wataru must have felt the same way, as he let out a faint snicker. That’s right, this is something like a greeting for us—

“Haha, you’re probably right.”

“Eh...”

.....What? In shock, I looked at Wataru. Why...Why do you make it sound like it’s the most natural thing in the world? Why did you just accept my words like that...? You didn’t do that before, right. As I was thinking that, Wataru turned his back towards me, returning to his seat.

Wait.

I found myself with the urge to stop him. However, right as I stood up, my smartphone came back to me. Kawai-san, a fellow member of the volleyball club like Kei, talked to me.

“Don’t worry! I made sure that the boys weren’t doing anything weird with it!”

Seeing Airi reflected on the screen, I finally came back to my senses. Even so, I was spacing out until the end of the lunch break.



During class, I realized that the other classmates made a new group in the messaging app we use, and invited me.

‘Strongest Girls of 2C’

...S-Strongest? I guess this is the class group? And, probably limited to only the girls. Hm...Wait, I don’t see Murata-san from the basketball club, or Koga-san from the tennis club...Now that I look at it, there’s no sports-type girls here...But, Kei is here at least...What kind of composition is this?

‘We’re not adding any vulgar girls.’

Um...that’s some severe thinking, dear class representative Iihoshi-san. Though, the girls who aren’t in here tend to use rather...well, vulgar language despite being girls, and even I feel a bit annoyed, but...

Despite us being in class, more and more messages came in. Since my phone continued vibrating on and on, I turned off that setting. Tell me that earlier, the teacher will realize...

‘Um...Would that be okay, Natsukawa-san?’

Okay...Eh, what? When I looked up, several girls looked over at me. Gazing down at my phone screen again, a few of the girls, including Shirai-san, were talking about wanting to visit Airi...Ah, that continuation from before. There’s girls who have club duties today after school, so only those who have time would be stopping by. Um...Since the volleyball club doesn’t have practice today, Kei can join as well. That would make it four people...Yeah, that much should be enough. I don’t want Airi to get scared after all.

‘Yes, that would be okay.’

‘I’m going to quit the club, so could I come with you...?’

E-Eh, quit your club? For something like this? Do you want to meet Airi that badly?

‘Calm down, Maichi.’

‘.....Yeah.’

Saitou-san from the tea ceremony club...Why does it feel like she only reluctantly gave up on her idea? Also, when I looked up at her, sitting in the class, she gazed at me with teary eyes. What would have happened if Kei didn’t calm her down?

‘Um...I’m sorry, Sasaki-kun wants to come as well. The soccer club seems to have no training tomorrow...’

Eh? S-Sasaki-kun...? Sasaki-kun...Well, he seems like the proper type of boy, so maybe that should be fine. Since there’s four other girls with us, nothing dangerous should happen. Maybe Airi will even see him like a kind and gentle Onii-san...That’s right, a kind Onii-san...

“.....”

In the corner of my field of view, there was a single boy sitting in the front row at the hallway’s side, almost blending into the view...Will that guy come? He was clinging to me like crazy before...Maybe he wants to...tag along...after all...?

Since he always sat next to me, I could never get a good look at it. Not to mention that he would always approach me immediately, so there was no need for me to even question that. Yet, right now... What’s that complicated face for? What are you thinking about? That’s not like you.

Is it because of what I said...? Is that why you won’t talk to me anymore...? What’s with that...Constantly clinging to me, only to leave me alone like that. How selfish can you be? In the end, all you do is trouble me. Playing around with other people’s hearts, don’t think I’ll give you any more attention.

*

My angry emotions remained even until all classes for the day ended. It really felt like I could say whatever I want without showing any restraint. After the final roll call ended, I walked towards that guy, who prepared to head home quickly, and stopped him.

“H-Hey...”

“...Oh, yeah what’s up?” That guy turned towards me.

When he looked at my face, that complicated expression he had earlier changed immediately, and was replaced by a faint sense of relief, as he responded with a bright and calm voice—H-Hey, what’s that...What’s that face...You never showed me that kind of expression before!

“Um, Natsukawa? What’s wrong? Why’re you panicking?”

“I-I’m not panicking or anything!”

“Ohhhokay...”

I subconsciously panicked, so I raised my voice to cover that up. J-Just get to the point already! You want to see my little sister, right! Go on, I’m giving you permission to say it!

“S-Say...are you really not coming...?”

Ugh...I’m not getting it across at all. That’s almost like I want him to come over! What will happen if he starts getting on a high horse again!

“Coming...? What are you—”

“Would you look at that, your final roll call ended already.”

“Huh...?”

Right as he was mid-sentence, the door to the classroom opened, and Shinomiya-senpai showed her face. Everyone looked at her in surprise—Except Kei, who stood frozen in shock, just watching Shinomiya-senpai walk towards Wataru.

“Hey there. I know that it must have been a rough day, but can I borrow Sajou for a bit longer?”

“P-P-P-Please go ahead! Boil him, burn him, expose him on social networks, do however you please!”

“Ashidaaaa!”

Shinomiya-senpai has business with Wataru——Eh? After school? How I see things, she didn't come here as the public morals committee president. D-Do they have some kind of special relationship...? Do these two...?

“Sorry about that. What were you saying, Natsukawa?”

“N-Nothing at all! Just go already!”

“Your wish is my command!”

What are you, some soldier!? What kind of response was that! See, Shinomiya-senpai is looking at us like we're weirdos! What if she gets the wrong idea!? And why do you seem so happy!? Wataru walked away like he got kicked by me, reaching Shinomiya-senpai. She advised him to change the location, and that's the last I saw of that guy today.

*

Some classmates came over. Airi was happy that things grew more noisy, and being hugged and doted on by everybody made her smile like a blooming flower. Watching her like that, I was happy myself. Guess it was a good idea to bring them with me.

“Airi-chan, my name is Takaaki. Ta-ka-a-ki~”

“Takaki!”

“Ahahaha, Takaki! What's up, Takaki-kun!”

“I-It's Takaaki!”

They were all trying to have Airi remember their names. They won't be meeting that frequently...So they'd probably be delighted if she remembered their names in case they ran into each other outside.

“So cute, I wanna take her home!”

“Eh, y-you can't!”

“Then I'll take Aichi!”

“What are you talking about...” I stopped Kei who closed in on me.

Failing to catch me, she instead pressed her cheek against me, which had me burst out laughing.

“Ta-ka-a-ki!”

“T-T-Takaaki!”

“That’s right! Takaaki!”

“Takaaki!”

“Ohh! Now you remembered all our names!”

“Amazing!”

With Sasaki-kun being the last one, Airi managed to remember all of the people’s names. As everyone else raised happy cheers, Airi looked at Shirai-san and Okamoto-san’s faces, and her smile grew stiff. A-Ah, she must have forgotten their names already.

“.....Waah.” She teared up.

“Airi, come here.”

“Okay...”

When I called out to her, Airi quickly walked towards me. I put her up on my lap, and gently rubbed her head, to which she narrowed her eyes in a happy way. Yep, she really is cute. No matter what, I will protect her.

“See, that must have been too much for Airi-chan!”

“Guess that’s as far as we can take it~”

“Her worried expression is cute as well.”

“Hey.”

Well, four people at once might be too much for her. Even I wouldn’t be able to remember all of these names. When Kei and I first met, it

was associated with the volleyball club, but since she immediately named herself, I could remember her name fairly easily. When she first came here, it was the same with Airi...I guess Kei is just pretty good at that.

“You remembered lots of them huh, Airi.”

“Yup...!”

“Ugh...!”

When Airi showed a bright smile, Okamoto-san collapsed to the ground. She kept saying ‘How great, how great’ with tears in her eyes, only to get a wry smile from Shirai-san. Then again, I can’t blame her, I had a similar reaction when Airi was still young.

“.....Ah...”

I felt the weight in my arms grow heavier. Together with Kei’s voice, I realized that Airi had gotten sleepy. She played around lots today, so she must be exhausted much earlier than usual. I put down Airi at a safe place, and we disbanded for the day. Standing at the entrance, I saw everyone off.

“Thanks a lot for today, Natsukawa.”

“Airi-chan was even more cute than in the pictures!”

“Fufu, right?”

“You’re cute as well, Aichi!”

“I’m tired of that stick, Kei.”

Everyone gave their impressions of my cute little sister. Of course, of course, you can never get tired of her. And don’t you worry, I’ll be enjoying her sleeping face later as well...!

“Ah, but. Bringing someone else over would be difficult for a while~”

“...Eh?”

“We had her remember too much today after all.”

“It’s four of us in the end. Even if Natsukawa-san might be okay with it, I wouldn’t want to force Airi-chan.”

Yeah...When Shirai-san introduced herself first, Airi tried her best to remember her name. If I brought even more people to visit Airi, her head might burst from all the overflowing information. I guess they were all being considerate of Airi after all...

“...Tha...”

“Hm...?”

“...T-Thanks...”

“~~~! Aichi!!!!”

“Kya...W-What are you doing!”

How long has it been since I earnestly thanked someone outside my family...Thanks to that, and me being flustered, Kei clung to me.

“So cute...! You’re too cute...Aichi...!”

“K-Kei...!?”

“...Woah...”

“Ah, no! Sasaki-kun, no looking! You can’t look!”

“W-Why!?”

Right as I was busy pulling away Kei, I saw Okamoto-san and the others covering Sasaki-kun’s eyes. Seems like us playing around might have looked a bit suggestive. Learning of this, I grew even more desperate to push Kei away from me.

“C-Come on...where did that come from!”

“S-Sorry...I just couldn’t hold it down anymore...”

“What exactly!?”

“M-My libido~”

“The heck is up with that...”

Even if I’m thankful, that doesn’t mean you get a free pass to do everything you want...W-Where are you burying your face...!

As we were talking at the entrance, the sun started to set. Summer season was starting after all. And, with the sun this low, it was time after all.

“Airi likes it when it’s noisy. I’m sure she’ll be the one who wants to meet you all again, so I’ll let you know.”

“Yay...! We can meet her again!”

“No, next time it’s Shiori and the others, right?”

“Ehhh?”

Everyone’s excited. But, that definitely isn’t a bad thing. I could watch them with a gentle emotion filling me. But, these feelings were all blown away when Airi suddenly appeared.

“—Mmm...Takaaki...”

“!”

“Eh...? Airi-chan?”

Airi arrived at the entrance, clinging to Sasaki-kun’s leg. Almost like a little sister being spoiled by her big brother.

“Ahaha...now that I think about it, Sasaki-kun is an actual older brother, right.”

“Isn’t your little sister going to get jealous about this?”

“Yuki was cute like this as well...”

“Ahhh! You should have said ‘Is still cute’ there! I feel bad for your little sis!”

Sasaki-kun gently caressed Airi's head, with the face of a real older brother. Airi herself gave in to that, and showed a tired face, about to fall asleep.

“.....Come on, Airi.”

“Mmm...? Onee-chan...?”

When I called out to her, Airi staggered towards me. I picked her up like that, and this time she rested her body against me. Children fall asleep quickly after all. But, since she immediately gave in to her slumber made me realize that she probably trusted me a lot, which had me a bit happy inside.

“...Aichi?”

“...She fell asleep. Sorry about that, Sasaki-kun.”

“It's fine. It just reminded me of a long time ago, which got me a bit nostalgic.”

“I see...”

And with that, we disbanded for good. Everyone walked away, waving at me with smiles on their faces, until they fully disappeared.

“...Are you not going home?”

“Ehehe...Aichi!!!, let me stay over—”

“Go home.”

“Bleeeeh!”

As cunning as always, that Kei. She's still wearing her uniform, with no other change of clothes at her disposal. I could maybe lend her something, but the size...I didn't want her to complain about it being too tight, so no can do. Nor do I want her to think it's too loose since she's in a sports club...Then again, I doubt she's too serious about staying over either.

After seeing her off, I returned inside my home. Since we didn't even

finish dinner yet, I couldn't let Airi sleep like this. When I gently tapped her on the head as I put her down on the living room sofa, she slowly opened her eyes.

"Mmm...?"

"Come on, Airi."

"Ah, did your friends go home?"

"Yup."

Mom was preparing the dinner in the kitchen, as she looked at me with a smile. She might have been a bit happy because I rarely brought friends home with me. It felt a bit embarrassing to be honest...Just as it became a bit uncomfortable, Airi spoke up.

"...Where's Takaaki..."

"Airi."

"Waahh..."

I don't know why, but my voice sounded oddly devoid of emotion. Airi must have thought that I had been angry, which is why she looked at me in uneasiness. I acted like that didn't happen, and instead put her on my lap, gently embracing her. That must have reassured her, as she gave in, and leaned against me as she looked up.

"Did you have fun, Airi?"

"Yup, it was lots of fun...!"

"I see, I'm glad to hear that."

Letting her hop up and down on my lap must have woken Airi up completely, as a certain level of energy returned to her voice. I guess that children really get tired as quickly as they recover. I'm honestly worried if she can properly sleep tonight.

"Airi, do you remember everyone."

“Yup! Remember them!”

“I see...Then, who do you remember the most?”

“Takaaki!”

“I see...So, listen...”

Listen...? What was I about to say? Isn't it fine? Sasaki-kun has an actual little sister, and he was really kind towards Airi. There's nothing weird about this.

‘You remembered lots of them huh, Airi.’

‘We had her memorize too much today after all.’

‘It's four of us in the end.’

“.....”

Airi had fun on her own, and tried her best to remember everyone. It was a fresh experience that will surely influence her down the line. Getting attention from kind people like that...I'm sure this must have been a great influence for Airi. And yet...even that being the case... why do I feel so gloomy and hazy deep inside my chest?

“Airi.”

“Whaaat?”

“Don't...get too clingy to other people, okay.”

“Okaaay~”

She showed me a gentle smile, and I think I said it in a kind way. But, if I didn't say what I wanted to, I wouldn't be able to rest easily.

“Say, Airi.”

“Hmmm?”

What am I thinking? This isn't like me. I should have hated it. I didn't want Airi to be influenced negatively. That's why I tried and decided

for that guy not to meet her. Yet—

“—Can you maybe memorize one more person?”

“Ehhhh?”

Chapter 12: The Dreaming Boy Averts his Eyes from Reality

Our uniforms finally switched to our summer versions, and it felt like the amount of hot sunlight had gone up as well. Although I started to leave the house a bit later since I didn't have to chase after Natsukawa again, now that the sun had risen like this, it was quite hot. Then again, getting up early is not exactly in my best interest either. I really don't need any summer after all.

"...Shit."

Arriving at a later time period, students were filling the area near the school gate. But, because of the heat sizzling down onto them, they looked more like zombies than anything. I'm sure that my expression must be about similar right now. I wouldn't be too surprised if a sniper was aiming for my head right now.

"Oh...Ah~ha."

Entering the school next to the shoe lockers, I was hit with a comfortable breeze. What is this refreshing feeling? I subconsciously took a deep breath like that. The zombies around me had turned into humans again as well. Hey, you two lovebirds over there! Just because it's more cool in here doesn't mean you can start flirting.

By the time I made it to the classroom, I already forgot about the whole summer thing. Instead, the air around me felt comfortable, and I don't think I ever had such a pleasant Monday for quite some time. This might be the first time I got to spend a summer day this relaxing at school.

This refreshing atmosphere grew even stronger when I entered the classroom. Ahh, so comfortable...Today, I might actually feel motivated to study. What was the first period again? Modern Japanese? Alright, time to take a nap.

All the sweat that had built up on my body on the way to school was

gone, like a squirrel that woke up after its hibernation. Wiping it away once had it disappear forever. Have a good sleep, my sweat glands.

Shortly after making it inside, the chime rang, informing us that morning homeroom was about to begin. Did I make it that close...?

“Ah! Morning, Sajocchi!”

“.....*Oh...*”

“Huh?”

When Ashida approached me, I was showered with admiration. She wore the girls’ summer uniform. The thick fabric and variation of colors had been replaced by white equipment just as the boys were wearing...Ahh, this is heaven...Even Ashida looks so dazzling to me...This is weird, Big Sis didn’t give off that feeling at all.

“Morning. This is actually pretty bad for my heart, so could you not appear in front of me so lightly-clothed?”

“Can you not call the girls’ uniform ‘lightly-clothed’, you pervert?”

I mean, your DEF value went down from 95 to like...20. Compared to that, your ATK damage towards boys went up like 70-fold. Look at that, all the other boys can only look outside the window, or they’d get chastised.

“B-But...I understand what you’re trying to say...It looks good on me, right?”

“Ah!? Where’s Natsukawa!? I need to see her summer uniform!”

“Ah, you bastard!”

Hey, don’t kick my shin! It was my fault okay, just stop it! That hurts! So, where’s Natsukawa? Looking behind Ashida, I could see Natsukawa talking with a few other girls. Is this a flock of fairies? Did I always get this much stimulation from a uniform change? Man, now I might just look forward to summer.

You damn bastards, you're covering my view on Natsukawa. Get out of the way, and flirt with someone else.

"Why'd you need to get that desperate? You can see it for yourself later~"

"I would feel bad for separating Natsukawa-sama from the other ladies she's talking to."

"Mind explaining how I'm different from the other girls?"

"If I approach her any further, I won't be able to watch the entire panorama."

"Listen to me. Also, panorama..."

It's definitely not like I'm scared of Natsukawa giving me a gaze like 'Don't get any closer to me or you'll get hurt', or anything like that. I'm not lying, I only wish to observe her beauty from afar. Oh right, talking about that.

"Ashida, you went to Natsukawa's palace, right?"

"Ah...Hehe...!"

"Hmm?"

This time, Ashida's expression turned into a grin, and I could tell she'd become noisy any second. Even her face just said 'Wanna hear? Wanna hear?', and she started doing something on her phone...Eh, you took pictures? Wait a second. Only Airi-chan? Show it to me, I'm a good boi, I deserve it.

"Wanna seeeee?"

"Shut up...!"

Who cares! Just take this secret picture I took of Big Sis as she was sleeping in the living room...! Why did I even take that picture? Aren't I a bit too suicidal? If she finds out, I'm dead for sure. And, 4K even...K4...I might be able to get some good money if I sold this to the student council Senpais.

“Big Sis...I’m sorry.”

“I don’t really get it, but can’t you just delete it?”

“I’m going to use that whenever I have to lie about having a girlfriend.”

“The hell is wrong with you...”

Nobody can break my 5-layer lock. Eh? Why am I doing this far for a picture of my Big Sis? That’s not all, Barou¹, huehuehue.

“Good morning. It sure is fresh today.”

“Good morning~”

In the end, the homeroom started without me talking to Natsukawa. I don’t know why, but Ashida seemed to be angry at me, as she constantly kicked the back of my chair. But, I ignored her, as I am a diligent student. Teacheeeeer, there’s bullying going on in this school!

*

Isn’t summer a bit too comfortable? Around the third period, I realized. It’s not like I was making big progress in Math A, but it really didn’t feel like summer at all. Maybe this is because of this being a high-level school, their care for the students is incomparable. Summer is the best, thank you very much, Natsukawa. Cheers to Natsukawa...Huh? Why am I thinking about that?

“Alright, that’ll be all for today.”

The teacher who moved here from Kansai let out a listless voice, and finished the class. That’s great. I didn’t pay any attention in class, but this is fine. As long as the boredom is gone, time passes more quickly. That’s why I like Math A (*But I’m bad at it).

“H-Hey, Sajocchi...!”

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

After the class ended, I was busy preparing for the next one, when

Ashida frantically tapped me on the shoulder. What is she panicking for?

“What happened to you!? You haven’t talked once with Aichi yet, have you!?”

“Um...Well, we’re at this distance right now, so...”

One is in the corner of the classroom, the other is in the middle, but in the back. I feel like the day might just pass without us talking a single word. But, that won’t happen right? After all, my eyes already burned the sight of Natsukawa with her summer uniform in her eyes for about 67 times.

Not to mention that, from how I judge things, Natsukawa is often talking with someone else. Even right now, she’s occupied with Sasaki—Sasaki, don’t you dare touch Natsukawa with a finger of yours. I’ll make holes all over your body with the soccer club’s ball.

At the same time, Natsukawa showed a normal smile after being talked to. So cute. That’s an expression she definitely wouldn’t show towards me. I’m special towards her in the bad sense, so just talking to her like that might be difficult.

“...Yep, it’s normal, right.”

Eventually, more and more people will fill Natsukawa’s surroundings, and the annoyance that I delivered all these years will be gone. Then, with Shirai-san and Yamazaki as the leaders, I might be able to get myself a position in that group somewhere on the far rear. However, now is not the time just yet.

“I’d feel bad to be a bother, so I’m good.”

“Bother...A bother, you say?” Ashida blinked at me in confusion.

I can feel a disturbing atmosphere fill the place. However, if I were to approach Natsukawa like this, I might destroy the comfortable mood they built up. As long as my image of being her little finger doesn’t disappear in this school year, I feel like any needless approach would just hurt her.

“That’s not true...I think.” Ashida muttered, and made her way towards Natsukawa.

...That is true, Ashida. Just look at them. It’s not just about me and Natsukawa. You need to consider what everyone else is thinking. At the very least, for right now, I shouldn’t join in, because that’ll play in Natsukawa’s favor, right?

*

“I wanna eat Häagen...”

“That abbreviation sure sounds cool...”

In rough times, even cheap things can cheer you up, right? Is cheap ice cream not enough for you? Why do you always have to go two ranks higher than normal...The karma of Häagen is deep. Despite that, watermelon bars give you this nostalgic taste, and fill you with warmth instead. Though, I haven’t eaten some in years.

Ashida was leaning on the desk, and despite us being in class, she constantly kicked my ass while complaining how hot it was. Now my own ass has gone hot. Also, at least use your hands so I can feel some kind of pleasure in this...Well, she’d probably lose her normie status at that...Teacher, there’s still bullying going on in this school...**Sniff sniff.**

After that, when I came with Ashida to buy some ice, I slipped some ice packs down her back, to which she landed a magnificent spike of that pack right into my face. That’s the power of a volleyball club member for you. Now it melted on the floor.

Before the next period started, I was busy doing some stuff on my phone, when a shadow fell on my hands. I just faintly directed my attention to my side, and immediately understood who I was dealing with.

“——Hey.”

Ohh, Goddess. Have you descended again. This is the first time you got this close to me in your new summer uniform. Damn it, I really want to turn over and stare at her. But, she’ll crush my eyes if I do!

(*No she won't).

“Hey, listen to me!”

“No, she wo—Eh, me?”

“...Y-Yes, you.”

I realized that she put her hands on my desk. Since this is Natsukawa we're talking about, I figured she was actually talking with Ashida behind me. Leaving aside that misunderstanding, Natsukawa actually had her body turned towards me. This...is quite the stimulation...!



“Y-Yeah...? What do you want?”

“Sajocchi, you’re acting really suspicious.”

“Natsukawa, what do you want? My body won’t hold out like this.”

“I’m not a pesticide.”

“And I’m not an insect...”

I was expecting some light-hearted retort, not a full blown slash of a sharp knife. Never change, Natsukawa. How can you treat people as insects this easily? You must be joking about this right...You’re not? Okay, then I’m just going to stare at you then.

“...560 points.”

“Then you get 49.”

“Um...can’t I get at least one point...?”

She’s really grinding me to death here...Then again, life is always about barely scraping by. Even if she suddenly stepped on the brakes, I’d still fall down the cliff in the end. Also, why are you snickering like that, you’re so damn cute...600 points.

“Well, whatever. What did you want, Natsukawa?”

“Huh...!?”

“...?”

My Goddess’ smile vanished immediately. She suddenly looked flustered, almost panicking. Um...? Did she miss her timing or something? If I stayed silent, maybe she would have kept laughing instead.

“Um, Natsukawa?”

“Um...Well...Y-You know...”

“Yup.”

She seemed restless. I was watching her like that, which made me feel even more like a suspicious person. Just what...Ah!? Isn’t Natsukawa blushing!? What’s this!? What’s going on!?

“So...after this...my place...Um...”

“.....”

“Uuuu...”

“...???”

Now I’m completely lost. I found myself tilting my head in confusion. No, think about this, me. Natsukawa is trying to tell me something. If it’s me, I should be able to figure it out, I’ve known Natsukawa for years...! There’s nothing I don’t know about her...I will figure out this truth!

“—G-Gross.”

“Gah...!”

“Aichi!?”

“Ah, no...!”

“Sajocchi!? Breathe! Don’t you die on me!”

I could feel my consciousness drifting away. It was a short life, huh... If there was one regret I have, then it’s the PC in my room. Maybe it could explode with my own body. Then I could go on a one-time trip down to hell. Eh, heaven? Can I really go there, God!?

“H-Hold on, Aichi...! Sajocchi is somewhat of a human being, you know!?”

“Somewhat!? Somewhat!?”

Hearing a word I could not ignore, I came back to life. What is she? A genius who can save people about to die? And why do you look so proud, you’re only hurting me more! Put away that shit-faced grin.

“Natsukawa, forgive me...I won’t bother you anymore...”

“W-Who said you were a bother...”

Eh, am I wrong? I thought she came towards me and get revenge for everything I’ve done so far...Eh? Was that ‘Gross’ just now meant as a reward? Then, I might just lose all my will to live. I can’t take that...

“W-Well...”

“.....”

The best I can do here is bear with it, and wait for Natsukawa’s words, I guess. I’m used to not listening to her words after all. As I made up my mind, Natsukawa silently took one step, and then another backwards.

“...Do I just have to die then?”

“What are you saying!? Hey, Aichi!?”

“Wah, eh!? Wait, Kei...!?”

Ashida suddenly stood up, grabbing both of Natsukawa’s shoulders, and pulled her out to the hallway. I could hear Ashida say something in a loud voice, Natsukawa trying to argue back, but I couldn’t make out exactly what they said. Just what is going on here?

“What happened over here?”

“...Eh, Sasaki...? It’s Sasaki!”

“Why do you make it sound like we haven’t met for years...”

Not even limited to Sasaki, since I’ve been trying to keep it more docile as of late, I didn’t really fool around with the boys anymore. Especially Yamazaki, I feel like I’ve gotten more clever since I stopped hanging around with him. His negative influence is no joke...

“You must be busy with soccer practice as of late, right? How are you and Yamazaki doing?”

“Don’t lump me in together with that guy. I don’t like that.”

“Yamazaki-kyun...”

I feel bad for that guy. To think Sasaki, someone he was fairly close with, would say such a thing about him. How pitiful...Or so I thought, but be it Big Sis, Natsukawa, or even Ashida, they aren’t treating me much better. Sometimes I wonder if I’m even worth

anything as a human...I am a primate. Return to monke.

“Sajou.”

“Hm...?”

“Airi-chan was really cute, you know.”

“What...did you say...?”

...Ah, Natsukawa’s little sister. I was wondering who he was talking about for a second. Figured he might have been bragging about some girlfriend of his. Also, does he really not have one? He’s in the soccer club, and fairly handsome. It’s kind of a waste, even from my point of view.

As I was overreacting, my smartphone vibrated, telling me of a new message. Who is it now...Wait, Sasaki? He sent me a selfie with him and Natsukawa’s little sister. Ohh, she’s pretty close with him. That’s what you’d expect from someone who’s an actual older brother. Not to mention that Airi-chan is really cute. I’m sure she’ll grow up to become a beauty like Natsukawa herself.

I see, so that’s what this is about...

“I’ll tell Yuki-chan about this.”

“Ah! You bastard, don’t you dare! Don’t go save that picture!”

“You underestimated the brocon tendencies of your little sister! If it’s for you, she’d be willing to even text me or Yamazaki!”

“Ah...ahhhhhh...!”

Hey now, is that really such a big deal? I was only joking around... Also, is it that bad to have a brocon little sister? I wouldn’t mind having a little sis like Yuki-chan. I want her to snuggle up to me in my bed. Ah, I got a response.

‘Thank you very much for the picture. I will become a young girl myself.’

Huh, she sure is determined to...Wait, young girl? What might she be talking about? Is she going to swallow some of that apotoxin? She should be in middle school right now, isn't she...I feel like she'd turn into a toddler...Imagine her talking normally while in that body, haha.

Nevermind that, I feel like Sasaki will be called to a severe family meeting once he gets home. The dangerous one, I bet. That's just what kind of girl his little sister is.

*

Just like Sasaki's flag of his societal dag was hoisted, mine to get slaughtered by Big Sis was hoisted all the same (*Unconditional and unrelated). Natsukawa and Ashida went off somewhere, so I went to get up from my seat, only to be interrupted by my phone buzzing.

'No need today.'

Eh, you sure? Are you telling me not to come to the student council office, or for me to even go home? I pray that it's the former. That reminds me, I didn't really talk too much with Big Sis for the past few days. We don't have many connections in our lifestyle after all...I do think she's attending cram school after all, since I barely see her at home. But, it's rare...

"Yo, Sajou! We didn't talk much after the seat change, right!"

"Yamazaki."

A wild Yamazaki appeared! He's as energetic as always, huh. Before, I felt this odd resistance towards him since our characters practically overlapped. Not to mention that he had this weird resistance as well, almost like he hated losing or something like that. Sasaki might be a handsome guy, but going by face alone, Yamazaki isn't half bad either. However, he really shows that looks isn't everything to get you popular. In fact, I feel my IQ dropping just by talking to him.

"Got shoved in the corner, didn't you. Guess you really can only stay quiet with nobody around you know~"

"So who'd bother with you?"

“Don’t go underestimating me, alright. I have the girls around me actually care. As of late I’ve been talking with this and that with Koga...”

“Huh? Dude, Koga is...”

Koga is the name of a girl in this class, more specifically the type you can’t go against. She might be a bit on the smaller end, but as she’s part of the tennis club, she’s fairly tanned, behaves recklessly, and doesn’t really know how to read the mood. I guess that he’s talking with her in connection with Murata, who’s in the girls basketball club.

This isn’t just related to this class alone, but there’s always these yankee girls who go around announcing ‘Next time, I’ll do it with that guy from XX High!’. In order to approach them and their pink high school life in their heads, you need to either be a yankee like them, or a sports-type. Yamazaki might actually fit into that.

Now that I think about it, his looks and athletic abilities are much greater than mine, what’s this about?

“—Hm? Murata’s there as well, you know? Wanna eat together with us, Sajou?”

“Huh?”

Yamazaki put his arm on my shoulder, forcefully dragging me and my sweet bread along to the corner of the classroom where Koga’s group was making noise. Wow, the way she’s sitting cross-legged almost let’s me see something...

“Yo, I got this guy with me.”

“Ohh!? It’s Sajou! What’s up, wanna mix in with us?”

“He’s calmed down a lot. Got a change of character? Loner now?”

From the very beginning? Really? Just watching them makes me lose all respect for girls, you know. Just thinking that Ashida and Natsukawa might have something like that in them as well, I suddenly feel all cold inside. Well, that’s how reality works. Yamato

Nadeshiko²? What's that?

"I am, so what? You saw my seat, right?"

"Kyahaha! First one in the front! Not to mention in the corner! That's so funny!"

And, I'm an idiot myself for playing along with that girl's idiocy. Oddly enough, this is how you get the biggest voice in class. I don't get it. Basically, Yamazaki has his way of doing things, and I have my own.

"So, what's been going on as of late? How are things with Natsukawa-chan?"

"Don't see your lovers quarrel too much as of late."

"Yamazaki, you sold me out."

"I didn't though!?"

Playing dumb, moving the conversation in their favor at a thin line, just because the mood changes a bit, they think they're good at talking. In the end though, they'll laugh at everything.

"So, how far did you go?"

"That's right, you were like that even in middle school, right? Did you do it? Must have done it, right?"

What, that thin line didn't hold for long, huh. These guys like dirty jokes a bit too much. Not even boys break this easily. I can't even see them as girls anymore.

"As if, I don't even know where she lives."

"Eh, no way!? Aren't you a failure as a husband!?"

"So you haven't made any progress at all? Is she not charming enough for you?"

These guys really don't hold back at all. Are you saying that I'm

charming instead? I mean, look at these bowlegs of yours, you're over as a woman. If you knew how you looked, you'd understand how you never get a boyfriend. To whoever happens to accidentally fall in love with them, I'm so sorry.

"Well, look at Sajou's face~"

"Yeah, I don't think I could put up with that."

Huh? Yamazaki, you wanna fight? Aren't you quite arrogant just because we haven't talked for a while? I know that you can brag about that if you got confessed to by someone, but...No, he might not say it, but it could have happened already. A handsome guy and member of the basketball club is pretty much a good catch for any girl, and a status symbol. Leaving aside popularity or not, wanting to go out with that reasoning is pretty normal, no?

"What about you then, Yamazaki."

"Of course, I'm popular. I was even confessed to!"

"So? Who? Spit it out, bastard."

"Sajou's angry! That's so funny!"

"But seriously, who? Now I'm curious."

See? Out with it. We're with these members right now, so don't you think you can just walk away without saying anything. Depending on your answer, Koga's group here will make fun of you for the rest of the day. I'll fill my cup full of your tears as well.

"Don't be shocked, but it's actually class A's Okumura."

"Okumura...Murata, what kind of girl is she?"

"Eh? XXXX."

"Well, I doubt she was serious~"

Wow...You know that this is a high-level school, right? Excuse me, Shinomiya-senpai? Public morals aren't being protected at this

school. No good, she doesn't even care. Now it's your turn, class rep! Do your best, Iihoshi-san!"

"....."

Ah, Yamazaki's gotten all quiet now. Please, say something. I don't wanna be the only one talking to them...I can only talk about Natsukawa myself. Well, I do, but I don't wanna do any missionary work here...

"Anyway, what about you, Sajou?"

"Huh?"

"That girl from before. Brown hair, remember?"

...Is he talking about Aizawa? Come on, think about it. At first, I thought Aizawa was someone like Koga and the others of this group. But now, we are kindred souls...! Your cream puffs were great, Aizawa! Natsukawa was really happy about it! And, I can't betray a fellow. Looking at their faces, they must think that Aizawa is someone similar to them. Not even close, she's actually a fellow believer of the Natsukawa cult.

"Aizawa is—"

"Wataru!"

Eh, my follow-up for Aizawa was interrupted! What are you going to do about this! Now I'm not even satisfied! You know that Aizawa's only got eyes for Arimura-senpai ever since she started attending this school! They were walking down the hallway with interlocked arms (*According to Ashida)...I wonder why, I feel like the more I say, the worse it'll end for Aizawa's evaluation.

Also, who interrupted me there? What if your interruption ends up with a bad rumour spreading about Aizawa? Only pure evil would try to ruin that wonderful relationship she has with Senpai!

"Hey, Wataru...!!!"

"What do you——Eh?"

I was about to complain as I turned around, only to be greeted by Natsukawa, practically glaring at me. I never saw her this angry before, so I could only swallow my words, letting out a terrified voice. W-Why is she so angry...?

“Come with me!”

“Eh, hey!? Don’t just suddenly pull on—”

I wasn’t allowed any backtalk, as my eyes could barely keep up with the rapid change of scenery in front of me. Justd pulled along, I bumped into the teacher’s desk, but I didn’t even have time to worry about the pain. My head was full of Natsukawa’s previous outburst. What is going on...?

“Wah—Ah, eh, gush!?”

Pulled out onto the hallway, we passed by the stairs leading upstairs, and I was thrown on the ground in front of the music room. I barely didn’t manage to avoid the approaching door, so with a loud manga-like ‘Bang!’ sound, I bumped right into it, with the door slamming shut. What is going on...? In front of me was the angry Natsukawa. What is going on here!? Why is this happening!?

“Haaa...Huff...”

Ehh, she’s gasping for air...! Am I going to die after all? What is she going to do to me? Please, treat me kindly...Wait no, this isn’t the time to joke around. C-Calm down, me...! Think about what you did! Why could Natsukawa be angry...It must be related to what I did so far...!

—Um, there’s much stuff that I can’t even tell which might be the biggest reason!?

1 Seems to be some kind of conan reference, but I don’t do Conan, so that’s about all I know

2 The ideal Japanese wife, devoted to her husband, and pure

Chapter 13: The Siblings' Feelings, Both Unaware

A girl's angry face is a terrifying thing. It might not sound like that big of a deal, but the last time I saw it was when my Mom was super angry at me. Well, she's not exactly a girl. I went through it several times with Big Sis as well, shaking in fear with this demon in front of me, but that rage of hers usually cleared up not soon after. That's why I never saw her really blow a fuse for real...But, what if I wasn't around for her to vent off steam?

“.....”

“.....”

No, this moment is more dangerous than anything. I sat on the ground of the hallway, the door at my back. In the end, I was unable to do anything besides look up the angered expression of the number one beauty of my class. As you can tell, I don't know what's going on.

“...”

U-Um...could you maybe say something? I was only forced here, and thus don't know what exactly the problem is. Why is she so angry, and why am I alone with a beauty like her? Ah—Why do you look so shocked now? Why are you looking around? That troubled expression...That's the 'Now I did it', face, right? My back hurts, it's gotten cold.

“Um, Natsukawa...?”

“...W-What!?”

“You get...what I'm trying to say, right?”

“Urk...!”

No, I'm not angry. I'm happy that you pay this much attention to me,

and I know that just because I don't have any memory of it doesn't mean I never committed any mistakes. But, I need you to tell me the reason why you are this angry at me, my idol. Hey, why are your shoulders quivering like that...Ah, she's glaring at me...Eeek.

"...you..."

"...Eh?"

"Because...you..."

Sorry, what was that? What did she just say? Was I always the deaf type of protagonist? No, I did try my best in listening to her just now. Even during listening comprehension, I can pick up everything clearly, so it can't be my fault. Natsukawa might have realized that I had trouble understanding her, as she glared down at me. Don't do that, please...

"Natsukawa, sorry but could you—"

"Because you were talking with these girls!!"

"Say that again.....Eh?"

Wha...Eh? Wait...What? Alright, hold on a second. Time for a meeting, me. Get the boys together. What did Natsukawa just say? YOU—Yeah, this isn't the time to be joking around in English, me. You get that, right?

'Because you were talking with these girls', she said. Well, she must be talking about me being in that group of Koga, Murata, and Yamazaki. These guys really live in a different world from me. Yamazaki is right in the middle as well. The problem is with her words themselves. If I didn't know any better, she sounded like a girlfriend jealous of her boyfriend talking with another girl. The male part inside of me might be saying that, but it just sounds unreasonable.

Calm down, don't accept everything at face value. I'm sure that Natsukawa didn't say it with that kind of intention. But, what else...? Why else would she scream these words out loud. Ah man, I want to hug her.

“Ah...! A-Ah, wait! Don’t get the wrong idea! I didn’t mean it that way!”

“I-I know! I’m thinking about it right now!”

Because I talked with these girls and Yamazaki. That was the reason Natsukawa got angry...But, why? Why would she get angry at that? Crap, I don’t get it at all.

“...I got no clue.”

“See, you don’t get it!”

“Like hell I would! If those words weren’t driven by jealousy, then what else!? How cute can you be!”

“I-I’m not cute at all! That’s not the case, moron!”

“I know! That’s why I don’t get it!”

“L-Like I said...Ahhh, forget about it already!”

“H-Hey, Natsukawa!”

Natsukawa ruffled her fingers through her own hair as if to deal with the anger plaguing her, and walked away. Seems like she gave up on whatever she was planning. Ahh, such beautiful hair.

“Haaa...Up we go.”

All sound disappeared. The noise ringing in my ears until now was gone, and silence filled the air around me. Everything I could hear were the faint noises coming from the classrooms down the hallway. I stood up, and brushed the dust off my butt. Being screamed at, slammed on the ground, my back hurts, and yet I don’t understand anything.

Despite that, I don’t really feel angry at all. Though, that’s probably closely related to my feelings for her. Not to mention that there was something she wanted to tell me, but couldn’t properly put it into words. That’s why she could only walk away from this place. Yeah, that’s some good consistency. I don’t get much, but that at least

makes sense. However—

‘Because you were talking with these girls!!’

Despite thinking about it this much, why is it that I can’t figure out the meaning behind these words. If that isn’t jealousy, then what other motive is there...? Or, is there even any need for me to understand it? If Natsukawa is fine that way, then I won’t have to try and understand it either.

“...Ouch.”

But, I know that this isn’t normal. I’m not angry, but if I had to go through this pain, I would have rather gotten insulted by Big Sis in the student council office. Of course, that choice isn’t easy or anything.

I carefully snuck back to the classroom, but Natsukawa wasn’t back yet. My HP is practically 0 right now. I completely spaced out during the Classical Literature class, which earned me some extra work from the teacher.

*

“.....”

“.....”

Really, what is this? I only wanted to wake up normally in the morning, go to school, go back home, and go to bed, so why am I getting this much attention? I give up, what even is normal at this point?

“How may I help you, student council president.”

“Please, don’t call me like that. I’d like us to be on equal terms.”

“...Is that so.”

After classes ended, right as I stepped out of the classroom, the cool-type handsome guy Yuuki-senpai greeted me. Naturally, the surroundings grew noisy as a result of that, and I got all sorts of gazes

roughly translating to ‘What kind of business would he have with that guy?’. The girls raised cheers, whereas Koga and Murata looked at me with blood-shot eyes. What’s your problem?

“I won’t take much of your time. Can you just come with me for a second.”

“Well...sure. I just have to go home anyway, so I can take my time.”

“...What about that girl behind you?”

“Eh.....Eh?”

In confusion, I looked behind me. After confirming who I was looking at, I still blinked a few times. There was Natsukawa, reaching out for me with her hand, looking at Yuuki-senpai in shock. If I had to guess, she must have missed her timing to speak up. But, that doesn’t make this any less of an event for me, just seeing her reach out for me is pure happiness. What am I, a dog?

“What’s wrong, Natsukawa? Is this about before?”

“Ah.....”

Quite some time has passed since the afternoon. She must have figured out what she wanted to say to me by now. With how angry she was, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t curious. However, she’s not even looking me in the eyes. Then again, with a handsome guy like Yuuki-senpai in front of her, it’s not unthinkable that she might have frozen up because of him.

“...Another time then. Let’s go, Senpai.”

“Yeah.”

I turned around towards Senpai. Yuuki-senpai is quite the vulgar handsome guy (*Praise), so it wouldn’t be surprising for Natsukawa to forget all that anger she had. Just as I said before, an average guy like me is a pitiful being. Seeing the girl I like being stuck frozen in front of a handsome guy is something I can’t stand. I found myself trying to get Yuuki-senpai away from Natsukawa as quickly as possible.

After that, while watching the roughly 180cm tall guy of a Senpai walk next to me, it felt like I grew another 30cm myself.

*

What is expected from the student council president? To possess common sense. However, with Yuuki-senpai's irregular body height and face, no matter how calm and rational he may be, he's not fit to be the student council president.....I'm sorry, that was a lie. Thank you very much for not hating Big Sis.

We walked down the connecting passage between the two buildings, up on the third floor. There is a ceiling, but both walls to our sides were open, letting a faint south breeze hit my cheeks. But, because we were in the shadows of the sunlight, it wasn't necessarily warm or anything. When I looked down to the right of me, I could see students making their way home. All of them looked happy that they were freed from school.

"Sorry to suddenly call you over like that, Wataru."

"Ah, don't worry about it..."

More than that, the choice of this location is a perfect mark. Can't you learn a bit from his example, Shinomiya-senpai. Take a lesson from him, and gain some common sense...Ah, the season of love, I can feel it.

"Um...? Do you still need help with something?"

"That is a given...but that's not why I wanted to talk to you right now."

"Huh..."

With the culture festival approaching, the culture festival execution committee was established, which acts as the main preparation group for the festival. If I remember correctly, in the documents I was working on, I read a lot of 'Fall' and 'October', so there must be a lot of work still.

Leaving that aside, I wonder what he wants with me? I'm not some

highly-skilled, high stats handsome guy like Yuuki-senpai, so I doubt I can be of much help for him.

“So, Wataru...how do you feel about yourself?”

“...Excuse me? Myself? Like, my self-evaluation?”

“Indeed.”

Ehhh, what kind of question is that...Why would you ask about that? Am I being tested in something? Pulled into the student council depending on my answer? ...I'd rather not, you know.

“Umm...From an objective point of view, I feel like I'm pretty normal. If anything, there's barely anything that I could write about myself, it makes me want to cry.”

“.....”

While being on the lookout for Yuuki-senpai's expression, I let out a faint smile. After this, Senpai took a step back, and observed my entire body, from head to toe. Um...What is this about? You're scaring me.

“I see.”

I see, my ass. What are you just calmly analyzing? Just getting consent from someone after saying how average you are is much more annoying than you could think. We're weird living beings, okay. We're creatures!

“However, I heard that you were quite passionate about a certain girl for many years.”

“Just forget that already.”

I get that you're an upperclassman I should be treating with respect, but I can't do that if you suddenly bring that up. Do you want me to agonize over it even more, you bastard? Now I feel like jumping down here...Who was even spreading that? Must be Big Sis, alright. Why is she just blabbering about her younger brother's love life? That's exactly what I mean...

“Why did you stop?”

“I don’t see a reason to tell you.”

“...I see.”

You’re meddling too much now. Oddly enough, Yuuki-senpai backed down quietly when I warned him like that. Seems like he never really had any intention of questioning me too much. Why even ask that in the first place then? It’s hard to tell if you’re being considerate or not...

“Anyway, it seems like you went through some change as of late, right.”

“Well...that is true. I was just thinking about this and that. Rather, I stopped doing unnecessary things.”

“That reason...I won’t ask for it, but does Kaede know?”

“Big Sis...?”

I...don’t think she does. She must have seen the exchange I had with Natsukawa at my place, but I never talked to her about my own change of feelings. Not like I could talk about this with anybody, considering how embarrassing it is. Big Sis would just make fun of me for that, so I definitely can’t tell her.

“From the looks of it, you...haven’t talked to her about it.”

“She is probably the person who cares the least about me in this entire world. You saw how she treated me, was she ever acting like that towards you, Senpai?”

“She sure wasn’t...But, that was something else, alright.”

“Then there’s no need for me to talk about it.”

“Hehe...”

O-Ohh...Yuuki-senpai was snickering to himself. That’s not fair, even my heart skipped a beat. I can understand why that stalker of a rich

lady was so fascinated with Yuuki-senpai. I feel like even a popular American celebrity would go for him if they got the chance.

“However, she is quite interested in you nonetheless. After all, your change has left her bewildered.”

“Huh...? Big Sis was?”

Oh right, I feel like Kai-senpai said something about this. I think it was related to me entering puberty, but I didn’t really care about that, so I didn’t listen. Didn’t think that something like that would simply move Big Sis’ iron mentality.

“You might feel like it isn’t a bad change, but when we heard about it from Kaede, we felt differently. Especially about the part of giving up on the person you loved all this time.”

“So that Big Sis of mine even told you about that...”

“Don’t be like that, Kaede was asking us for advice.”

Well, from Big Sis’ point of view, with all the information she had, it might have looked like I started self-loathing who I was, lost confidence in myself, and quit going after the person I loved...I mean, it’s not too far off. I just stopped chasing after Natsukawa because I hated myself for it. But, I’m also trying to move forward, keeping a positive mindset.

“Kaede thinks that a big reason for this lies with herself. She’s worried that she might have destroyed her younger brother’s youth with her own hands.”

“.....”

I remember now. Kai-senpai said something similar. Back then, I just saw it as a joke and didn’t think about it much, but now even Yuuki-senpai is talking about...Big Sis, are you serious with that?

“Kaede definitely feels a certain level of guilt. We tried to cheer up, but...when she heard it from your own mouth, Kaede’s attitude changed entirely.”

“...What?”

“Didn’t you explain clearly how both Kaede and your dear mother always said ‘This is the level you are at’?”

“...A-Ah...”

...I faintly remember saying something along these lines...What I was trying to say is that I accepted those teachings, and wanted to reflect on them. I mean, both Big Sis and Mom weren’t wrong when they said that.

“That day was the first time we saw Kaede cry.”

“...! Wah, are you serious...!?”

“From the sounds of it, you don’t feel too dissatisfied with your current situation, I take it?”

“Huh...If anything, I feel like I’ve started to act how I truly am, with a befitting mindset, so I’m more relieved than anything to finally live on without shame...”

“I see...”

That day when I said that must have been a Friday. That explains why Big Sis didn’t talk to me all throughout the weekend. I don’t think I even saw her those two days. Basically, she was avoiding me. And now, Yuuki-senpai is coming to talk with me about it. Don’t you love Big Sis a bit too much?

“...I understand. Since this is a problem between us, I’ll try to deal with it. Just tell me one thing.”

“What is it?”

“The reason you told me about this. Is it because you don’t want Big Sis to be sad? Or, is it because you’re angry at me for making Big Sis sad?”

“.....”

Yuuki-senpai started thinking about it. I feel like answering either way would be troublesome for him, but he didn't take long to give me a straight answer.

"On top of all that, it's for myself."

"....."

The student council president has to be calm at any given moment. In other words, he has to be a human being who understands even vulgar, lowly intentions and feelings of the students beneath him. I thought that he was more up in his dreams and betting on hope, but it seems like even he can get heated about certain things.

"...Senpai, you are aware of your own looks, right?"

"This led to me falling from grace, yes. The one who picked me up from that was your older sister."

"...Seriously."

What the heck is that? That sounds more and more out of some academy drama.

*

'I'll prepare the place.' Yuuki-senpai said.

'Eh...'

I mean, I did say I would 'do something about it', but...in the family meeting kind of meaning. How could I go face Big Sis like that? I need to mentally prepare myself as well...I mean, you're telling me that Big Sis was crying? That Big Sis who would never show any human blood nor cry, telling me to go buy Häagen ice cream for her, ridiculing me that I'll never get popular? I feel like heaven and earth would twist around before she'd actually show a human emotion like that.

According to Yuuki-senpai, she was up on the rooftop. He'd use a random reason to send her there, and opened up the rooftop with the special right of the student council.

“...Haaa...” My sighs wouldn’t stop.

This development was far too quick and abrupt. Meeting her is one thing, but talking about something serious like that has the back of my head all itchy. This is the first time I ever walked up the stairs on the third floor. It was calm, almost dusty, and because of the time of day, fairly dark. For spending a normal student life, you’d only go up this place during your graduation. And yet, I found traces of someone who had already gotten ahead of me.

“Uuuu...”

Even if it was my insolent older sister, I don’t want to see her crying face. Just by imagining it, I felt all gloomy. This normally isn’t something a high school student my age should experience.

—That being the case, hearing about Big Sis crying somewhere I don’t even know of, there’s no way I can stay silent about it.

I opened up the rusty door. The creaky sound had me feel oddly agitated. My head was full of doubts and questions. Why am I here this late despite not having any club, why did the situation turn out like this, why am I heading up to the rooftop I should only be seeing once during my graduation, why did things end up so out of the norm.

—Since everything is full of mysteries, I’ll just ask the back of Big Sis’ head.

“—Big Sis.”

“Eh...?”

Right on the rooftop stood Big Sis. When I called out to her, she looked at me in shock, and took a step back.

“Huh...? Why are you here, Wataru...? Renji said that Rin was calling for me.”

“Hm...?”

R-Rin...? Is she talking about Shinomiya-senpai...? They’re friends...?

Now that I think about it, they're student council vice-president and public morals committee president, so it would be weird for them not to know each other. That's very much like Hanawa-senpai, what a skilled way to call Big Sis here. This once he could have failed for all I care...

"That was Senpai lying. Anyway, Big Sis...I heard you were crying?"

"Huh...? Eh!?"

I don't need any unnecessary preamble here. I want to get things over with. So, when I did just that, Big Sis stared at me in confusion, only to stagger backwards. Judging from that reaction...Yuuki-senpai wasn't lying.

"...Y-You...!!"

"The dear student council president told me about this. Couldn't exactly ignore that.

".....!"

Her younger brother found out that she was crying. I wonder what she's feeling right now. Since Big Sis is always acting tough, she might just be in complete denial of that. But, that doesn't mean I'd just go along with that.

"Say, Big Sis...Tell me ten things that are good about me. No, five is more than enough. Just tell me, what makes me stand out."

"Wha...? Where did that come from..."

"I mean it exactly as I said it. What are my good parts. You were worried about me enough to cry, right?"

"U-Um...!"

Compared to her usual broad and confident attitude, Big Sis now was stumbling over her own words, which left even me surprised. Though, I'm scared of what will come later. As for Big Sis, she was counting her fingers, clearly desperate to think of something. I was aware of this from the very beginning, and if there's nothing, then

that's totally fine.

"Enough, I get it."

"W-Wait...This...you're wrong...!"

"Then, next. Tell me ten points that are normal about me."

"Eh?! U-Um...!"

I'm not trying to test her or anything. I just want to know the reason. She's worried about me? Worried that she's the reason why I gave up on the girl I love? I wasn't even feeling that way, so don't just get the wrong idea. That's not like you, Big Sis.

"—Y-Your face!"

"My face."

"—Your height! Personality! Physique! Cleverness! Wealth!"

"Wealth."

"—Hairstyle! Fashion sense! Stamina! Cleanliness! Scent! Humour! Little bro strength!"

"....."

"—STR! DEF! SPD! DEX! LUK!"

"Hey now, we're talking about reality...Enough already, I get it! Just stop..."

Hold on a second, please. Wasn't that close to twenty now? I didn't ask for that many. Also, that later half, I don't know how these stats would be of help. Does Big Sis think in terms of battle statuses? I frantically stopped Big Sis, only for her to start gasping for air. Eh, is my normality unlimited? Is it that exhausting?

"See, you felt the same way as I do. I'm a perfectly normal guy."

"....."

“I’m normal. That’s a reality I accepted myself. You and Mom taught me of that reality, right? You didn’t say anything wrong, that’s why you don’t have to worry about it at all.”

“.....”

“It’s true that I gave up on a lot of things. However, that’s not because you or Mom forced me to do that. I just saw my shitty face in the mirror, and realized what kind of idiot I was, that’s all.”

It’s pathetic of me to say that, but that’s reality. This incident happened to remind me of that fact. I don’t see any reason for Big Sis to be bothered by that, and I don’t need any worrying from her.

“...I was shocked.”

“...Huh?”

“On the outside, they said they’d give up on the person they liked, but eventually couldn’t do that. There was a girl who suffered through that. That’s why I was worried that if you went through that as well, and that I was the one who started that...”

“...The heck is up with that?”

So, what? Everything I said so far only sounded like some ol’ facade? Even the things I said in front of Natsukawa herself, or in the student council office? She thought that I’m still head over heels for Natsukawa, unable to forget about her, which plagued me? So...the same as always?

“Don’t worry about it. I’m not trying to forget or anything. I still like her now, and I’m still stupid enough to wish for the **impossible**. Just, you know...I’m as normal as it gets, so I needed to at least be aware of that.”

“B-But, the reason you feel that way...is because I said too much after all...!”

If you’re aware of it, why couldn’t you just stop? Why is she regretting it now? What do you want me to do? Should I buy some steamed buns for her? Alright, I’ll buy their entire stock...! Will two

thousand yen be enough...?

“Again, that’s not—”

“L-Listen.”

“What?”

“I often talk badly about you, but I’m not serious at all. Be a bit more confident. Even if you’re aware of being normal, that doesn’t mean you should just give up on the girl you loved all these years.”

“Huh...?”

Big Sis sounded like she was trying to persuade me. Just when I was wondering what she got so desperate for, she started making excuses. What’s up with that? Why is she saying that now, this late in the game? Didn’t I just explain to her that she’s not even wrong? Why are you denying it now? Why did I say all that embarrassing stuff before then?

“I’ll fix myself. I won’t make fun of you anymore, and I’ll stop being unreasonable. There’s no need to look down on yourself like—”

“Will you give it a rest already, you damn bitch.”

“Wha...Wha!?”

I don’t think I was ever this pissed off before. If I was forced to stay silent any longer than that, I might have gone for her throat.

“Fix that? What exactly are you talking about? Am I going to be more confident because you stop insulting me, and stop being violent?”

“That’s not what...”

“What, you wanna reflect on it now? Become a kind older sister now? Who is that? I never had a **beautiful** older sister be kind to me.”

“.....”

It’s true that she might have been a bit rough towards me in this

relationship we have, but that was satisfying in itself. We're siblings, this is our relationship. You're saying that you'll destroy what we have, this balance of us throwing shit and everything at each other because we don't have to be considerate of each other? Stop joking around.

I don't have a 'Kind older sister'. Why did we end up like this today? Throwing unreasonable complaints at each other, cursing each other, not holding back at all, that's how we vibe. Isn't this what it means to have a place to return to?

"The Queen who would send me on errands, making me her servant without a single word of thanks, while sitting on the living room sofa, playing on her phone, stuffing her cheeks with meat buns—That's you. If you stop doing that, then you're not my Big Sis anymore."

"Urk...Y-You..."

I'm not a masochist. That's why I don't feel like getting hit all the time, or getting used like a slave. If Big Sis stayed as herself, and became more kind, that's one thing. But, what you got brewing in your stomach is something that can't be helped. There's no reason to hold yourself back at home. I don't wish for that.

"—At the very least, I like this kind of Big Sis the most."

"Wha..."

"That's why, don't bother me with some needless courtesy."

Please, I beg you. This is embarrassing. In the end, I basically told her to stay the way she is. Curse you, Yuuki-senpai. I won't ever get serious in front of Big Sis again.

"....."

"...What?"

"...Nothing, really." Big Sis seemed like she wanted to say something.

I returned a 'You got a problem' gaze. I can tell what you're thinking. 'What is this guy even talking about', right? I can tell that my

expression must be a mess. But, watching in silence just wasn't an option.

“Are you really sure about this? This might be the last time to turn me around.”

“Why is this the last chance? Just be kind either way.”

“Huh? Which one do you want now?”

That's not what this is about, right? Do you only have 0 or 100? You can just buy me some steamed buns at times, or share some of that Häagen with me, that's all I'm asking for...



“Huh?”

“Don’t just ‘Huh?’ me. How many more times do I have to say it before you’re satisfied?”

“No, not that. Behind you.”

“Heh? Behind me? What are you on ab—”

I turned around. Approaching me from the door was a girl, together with another girl from the volleyball club desperately trying to stop girl one. Hm? Hmmm...Is that some hallucination? Why would the classmate I love be here? And, why does she look so angry?

“Natsuka—”

“What kind of tone is that towards your own big sister!”

“Guho!?”

Eh, wha, not my collar.....Ehh!? Why!? Why is Natsukawa this angry!? Or, why is she even here...? Big Sis? Tone? Don't tell me... did she hear everything I just said!?

“Ehhh...?”

“You're an idiot! What do you mean 'Damn bitch'!? Saying that will only make your older sister sad! Hurry up and apologize!”

“Wahhhh, Aichi, stop stop! Sajocchi's frozen! He's not moving!”

Natsukawa was screaming at me, as Ashida came to the rescue. Now that I look at her, she's still wearing her volleyball club uniform. With protectors and everything, are you some female guard in the army? Also, your dazzling legs illuminated by the setting sun are a sight to behold...Praise the volleyball club.

“U-Um...Ashida?”

“Sorry! I'm really sorry! But don't worry! We only heard the very last part!”

“.....”

What exactly is this? What should I do? Also, they heard me after all? With Natsukawa holding on to my collar, I stood still. Despite letting go after a brief moment, Natsukawa still needed to be held back by Ashida. She's scaring me more than Big Sis right now, what is this? Same with the incident this noon, but what exactly am I doing wrong? Is she paying me back for all the times I bothered her? If so, then I'll gladly take it.

As I was left baffled, I looked over my back, my gaze meeting with Big Sis'. She's not hurt at all. Instead, just like me, she's lost because of the sudden appearance of Natsukawa and Ashida. She was looking between the two, her eyes open wide. Following that, she gave me an exhausted gaze.

"You..."

"Please, don't say anything."

I'm begging you. I couldn't even bring out a manly voice. If I get sandwiched now between Natsukawa and Big Sis...Ara, I don't even care anymore.

"Hey, are you listening!? This isn't the kind of attitude you have towards someone older than you! If you negatively influence Airi in any way, I won't ever forgive you, okay!?"

"H-Huh...?"

"Ah, Sajocchi...! There's a good reason for this! Could you come with us for a second!? Just think of it as helping me!"

"O-Okay..."

I don't really get it, but Ashida seems desperate at least. Not to mention that I get to watch Goddess Natsukawa entangled with Ashida's youthful body.

"Wataru."

Ahh, she stopped me, what a shame. So far, she had only been thin air in this situation, but now her mood must have taken a dip...She's not angry, is she?

"W-What?"

"Well...sorry. I think I was just confusing things."

"...Huh?"

"No...forget about it. Just go."

Go, she says. Also, how can I forget about that now. What is going on? She's not angry after all? I mean, I take it. She's not going to request some Häagen after this, right? And why am I so scared?

We'll meet each other at home anyway. That's why, I don't see the need to question her any further than this. Once I get home, she'll probably be rolling around on the sofa again. And then, she'll kick me when I complain. That is how our relationship works.

In the end, I was unsure if all of these problems were cleared up or not.

Chapter 14: To Her

School completely closed down, and for whatever reason that I cannot hope to comprehend, I found myself at a family restaurant with Natsukawa and Ashida. Since time had progressed quite a bit, I sent my Mom a message, saying that I didn't need any dinner. To my shock, I got back a message along the lines of 'Don't get captured by the police', practically saying that any crime is okay as long as I don't trouble her...

We arrived at a table, and finished ordering food. Right as we received water for the three of us, Ashida broke the ice. Because she hurried to put on her normal uniform, I could see wrinkles all over. Even Ashida seemed a bit annoyed, let alone Natsukawa...Scary.

"For starters, sorry that we listened in on the conversation between you and your older sister. We were searching for you, and saw you head up to the rooftop, so..."

"Ahh, I see. Well, it's fine."

"Y-Yeah...sorry."

I do faintly remember saying some embarrassing stuff, but that's related to only me and my older sister, so there's no real reason to dwell on that here. I tried to hide my shame with a deep voice, when Ashida approached my face with hers, whispering something to me.

"So, about Aichi today...Wasn't it a bit too crazy?"

"Yeah, sure was."

She was crazy cute as always. Ashida must have heard that nuance in my voice, because she gave me a blank stare. I guess she must be used to this, always around me and Natsukawa. Her guessing ability is on another level.

As for the Natsukawa in question, she had her arms crossed, her face averted in a clearly spoiled mood. She's even pouting, what is going

on? How cute can you be.

“Aren’t you a luxurious guy, Sajocchi. Being accompanied by two girls, heee?”

“Ah, yeah...”

Now that she told me directly, only then did I realize what kind of situation this was. I’m eating dinner with two classmates of mine. What is going on? I don’t even know why I was pulled here in the first place. Natsukawa was still looking outside the window. Ashida saw that, grew annoyed, and tapped Natsukawa on the lap.

“Aichi! I’ll be the one to say it then!”

“...G-Go ahead?”

“I really want you to be the one to say it! But at this rate, you won’t ever be able to, so I’ll just do the deed for you!”

“Urk...”

Why’re they both on edge? Is this some kind of fight? It’s rare for Ashida and Natsukawa to be so against each other. From my point of view, it almost looks like they’re trying to steal me from the other... Yeah, not happening. Excuse me, dear employee? Why are you looking at me like that? I’m not the one causing trouble, am I?

Thinking about it, I’ve seen this kind of bothered expression from Natsukawa many times. Rather than angry, it’s more like she’s fed up with me...I guess that makes sense. After everything I did to her. But, Natsukawa today was different. Never before was she this straightforward towards me with her anger. It’s almost revigorating.

“Well, you’re right. It felt like something was off. Even this noon, what was that about?”

“.....”

“A-Ahh...my back hurts...”

“Uuu...!”

Looking at Natsukawa's regretful and awkward expression, I could tell that she must have had some reason for it. Not to mention that it really reeks of her not wanting to talk to me about it. Ahh, her scent is overwhelming.

"Ah...Um, Sajocchi."

"W-Wait a second!"

Right as Ashida spoke up, she was interrupted by Natsukawa. Eh? Is she that desperate not to explain things to me? If so, there's really no need for her to force herself. I'm not a demon, you know. If it's just more trouble for Natsukawa, then I don't need to know...But, if it's only troublesome for me, then come!

"That's enough, Aichi. Today, you really took it too far."

"I-I feel bad, but...!"

I'm really happy that Ashida's my actual ally in this case, but if she's that hesitant to say it, it must be something troublesome, right? Be it Big Sis, or Natsukawa right now, there's so many things I don't really understand, but I'm not that angry either...I know, if I just pull out myself, then everything should be resolved, right? I'm an adult after all.

"Um, you don't have to force yourself, you know?"

"...Eh?"

"It must be hard to say, right? Don't worry about it. Everything will be fine as long as I don't talk about something vulgar with Koga or Murata, and I'll be more careful with my choice of words towards Big Sis."

Then again, I never had any plans of spending more time with that irregular group of girls, nor do I particularly like insulting Big Sis in that way. Leaving out my exchanges with Natsukawa, every conversation today was just exhausting. I don't want to go through that ever again.

Just like Yuuki-senpai said, if all of these problems are related to my

attitude, then it's my responsibility to deal with it. Either that, or it's slowly starting to take a trip into the right direction. Things won't stay this awkward and unorganised forever. I'm sure that Natsukawa must have been irritated by this, being so close to me. That's why, if I just take the fall here—

“—I-It won't be fine!”

“!?”

Eh, wha...? I-Is she angry after all? Even Ashida is looking at her in shock. I didn't think that the day would come where Natsukawa showed so much detest towards me. Fine, if you're going that far, then I'll stick around until the bitter end.....She'd probably hate me even more if I said that.

Ashida gave Natsukawa a criticizing gaze, who showed an awkward reaction in response, only faintly opening her mouth.

“A-After all...if I left you alone, you will do something weird again...”

“Cute—No, of course I won't.”

“Sajocchi, your true feelings are leaking. Why are you calmly commenting on that now?”

A goddess? An angel? No, she's a goddess. What kind of cute reaction is that. What am I supposed to do here? Draw circles three times and bark? I'll do that. I can even pay you money?

“Something weird? For example? What would make you angry, Natsukawa?”

“T-That's...”

“I mean, you don't need to say it.”

“Wha...W-Wait...! Can't you have a bit more concern!?”

“If it's about you, I'm always all ears, Natsukawa.”

“W-Wha...!”

“O-Ohh...Been a while since I heard that from Sajocchi.”

Ah, crap, I didn't mean to say that. All these habits I acquired over the years won't vanish that quickly. Saying this sort of stuff just comes out naturally. In that meaning, I guess it really would be better for me to keep my distance...But, staying away too far would be bad as well. I don't know how to properly draw the line here. I'm not even clinging to her that much, not to mention that that situation with Inatomi-senpai is still in my head.

All I knew is that I messed up, so I waited for her insults. I guess it really is my fault for staying around her.

“T-Then—”

“Huh...?”

O-Ohh? That isn't the reaction I expected. Isn't she going to call me gross like always? Why does she seem so determined now?

“—Then...C-Come visit my place!!”

“.....”

.....Eh?!?!?!?! (*Can't be put into words)

“A-Aichi...Do you plan on killing Sajocchi!?”

“...? Ah...!? Ahhhhhhhhhh!!!?”

“Wha...!? Why are you two agonizing over it now!? I'm the most embarrassed just watching you two! Hey, listen to meee!”



Afterword

Everyone, thank you for reading all the way until the end! And, I sincerely thank you for picking up volume 1 of [Yumemiru Danshi ha Genjitsushugisha]. It began as a web novel, and I could have never imagined that I would actually be writing this as a fully-fledged printed book one day.

Now then, I first began touching web novels under the name of ‘Okemaru’ when I was in middle school. Around that time, we were in the 2nd Pok*mon generation. After that, I continued reading over and over, only to finally start writing myself in high school. Thinking back on it, the term ‘Phone Novel’ is quite nostalgic, isn’t it.

It’s been many years since I first touched web novels, with me beginning to write them around ten years ago. During that time, this [Yumemiru Danshi ha Genjitsushugisha] was one of the two novels I worked on. I actually wrote another novel before this, can you imagine? Though, I’m too embarrassed to reveal the name here...

Thinking back on it, in high school, my dream must have been to become a light novel author. I had that dream through my university studies and work life, but I never would have expected it to actually turn out to be true. I mean, debuting after I’ve started working myself...you really never know what might happen in this world.

To be honest, I don’t even remember why I started writing the web novel of this series back in 2018. Neither do I know why I chose this ‘realistic love’ genre either. Whenever I was reading something, it was mostly of the fantasy genre. Maybe I did it as a change of pace from what I usually enjoy. And, thanks to the continued support from my fans, I am still here, still writing on it.

What I understood from reading and writing all these years, is that literary talent doesn’t matter. After all, this is a light novel. A light type of novel. Although I feel bad for my proofreader, whether or not your grammar or choice of words is all over the place, what’s most important is if the contents are interesting. I lost count on how many

times another novel has completely won me over. After all, once I set food onto the 'web novel' ground, I already sunk way too deep.

You must have figured it out by now, but I'm more driven towards 'web novels' than actual light novels. First being involved with an actual print of a web novel, hearing the back stories, grinning to myself...and also being exhausted. I can't contain all the gratitude I have for the people who helped me come this far. Of course, the main driving force for us to work are the voices of the readers. The dream is for my novel and others that I have read to leave the reader with something to take from it. That's why I'm sorry for only acknowledging that now.

I'm sure it must be the same for everyone, but this something to look forward to in my daily life is really what gives me strength to keep going. Even now, just picking up my smartphone to read web novels is such a simple yet overwhelming joy. I can't play pachinko right now in the stores, nor do I have the money to spend on sports like golfing. Just like someone said before, with something simple like this, you can improve your own mood yourself. This is the proof of being an adult. That's why, let's all sink deeper into this ocean!

Now in 2020, it is the same. As a reason for the delayed release can only be 'that', after all. The world is in turmoil, wary of the dangers, which is why the people are staying inside to protect themselves, and for many I could imagine that web novels are the only saving grace to keep their sanity. It is truly wonderful. Even when your stomach is empty and growling, you can feel it with joy from reading. In my case, I get enough nutrition by writing like this...But please, properly eat your food.

That reminds me, in this chaos, I was called by my family. At this point of this novel's release, I have been living in Tokyo for two years.

"Yo, should we send you something?" is what my father said.

"Toilet paper, please," is what I responded.

Thanks to that, I managed to do without using newspaper...

I experienced remote working as well. I think in English you call it *telecommunication*. Just opening up the PC to work from home, putting in the earphones I have from my Apple smartphone, that was a first for me. People outside must have thought I was crazy, always talking to myself...

Anyway, I've been talking about a lot of personal stuff, but I'd like to announce something very important! As it turns out, [Yumemiru Danshi ha Genjitsushugisha] will be receiving a second volume! Even I thought to myself 'Fast!' when I heard about it. It still didn't really set in...Of course, there are still many things that I want to show you, so I hope that you stick around for more of this realistic sweetness!

Finally, I need to say that I feel like it's an honor for my book to be with everyone during these troublesome times. At the same time, I am truly thankful that you allow me to work on something I enjoy from the bottom of my heart. To everyone who only learned of this series now, and those who have been around since the web novel times, I will continue to work hard for your sake, so I sincerely hope for your support.

Now then, let us meet in the second volume!

This has been Okemaru.